

**The adoption of social media and two-way communication by the  
top thirty New Zealand organisations: An examination of their  
websites**

**Irene Msimangira**

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**Primary Supervisor: Dr. Petra Theunissen**

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning”

Signed:

Irene Msimangira



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## **ABSTRACT**

Due to the proliferation of social media, organisations are encouraged to adopt social media features and participate in the social media environment. This research study examines the websites and selected social media pages of New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations for the adoption of social media and two-way communication. These websites and selected social media pages are platforms the organisation can utilise to manage organisational identity and put in place channels and procedures for two-way communication to occur.

A qualitative content analysis is used to conduct research on the thirty organisational websites and selected social media pages. The findings revealed not many organisations adopted relatively new social media and only few organisations had direct links to Facebook, Twitter or Youtube on the main organisational website. Also, organisations tended to use their websites as a source of information whereas in social media organisations are more concerned with the conservation and generation of return visits of their target public. Furthermore, organisations made an effort to use two-way communication in social media rather than organisational websites. Despite their efforts for two-way communication, social media pages are underutilised in facilitating dialogic communication with stakeholders. However, organisations that have adopted social media and use two-way communication show their efforts to adapt to an ever interactive and dynamic environment in which their organisation exists, grows and survives.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview**

The pervasiveness of social media has impacted the way in which organisations communicate and engage with stakeholders and wider publics. Social media has enabled the ability for people to interact, collaborate and share information. The nature of social media has provided an avenue for organisations to directly get in touch with their stakeholders and wider publics through two-way communication on websites and social media pages (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). As the trend for two-way communication increases, organisations are concerned with fostering dialogue, building relationships and managing their online reputation. The effort for organisations to also manage their online reputation stems from the capacity for people to share their opinions and evaluations of an organisation with each other in the online environment. A way organisations can manage and rehabilitate reputation in the online environment is by using public relations practitioners whose interests are to manage the mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders and wider public on which the organisations success depends on. The position and function of public relations practitioners within organisations links the organisation, its stakeholders and online communication. The research study is embedded in the functionalist paradigm which focuses on the analysis of how certain elements assist the organisation to function within its wider environment. In this study the adoption of social media and two-way communication on the websites and selected social media pages of New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations for 2010 will be studied. The need to study websites and social media comes from a handful of literature about social media and public relations that comprise of the terms 'efficiency', 'full potential' and 'effective use' of social media (Busirk, 2010; Wetzel, 2011; Briones et al., 2010). Many authors (e.g. Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Bortee & Seltzer, 2009; Park & Reber, 2008) believe traditional online features such as the organisational website are not employed to its full dialogic potential. The chapter will discuss the overview of social media and the impact on organisational reputation, the focus and frame of study, purpose, delimitations and importance of the study and finally outline the structure of the following chapters for this research study.

## **1.2 Overview of social media and impact on organisational reputation**

Social media encompasses terms such as interaction, collaboration, dynamism, participation, user-generated content and trust concepts (Bonsón & Flores, 2011; Henderson & Bowley, 2010). The terms suggest people are able to engage in online content, share and create content and also as social media allows organisations to foster two-way communication with stakeholders and wider publics, relationships can be formed however in order for this to occur laying the foundations of trust is important. Furthermore, social media consists of online technologies and practices that enable people to share content, opinions, experiences, perspectives and media (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010; Henderson & Bowley, 2010). This suggests people are empowered in the online environment because they have the capacity to control the information they consume, share and distribute. Social media features include social networks (Facebook) , micro blogging (Twitter), blogs, podcasts, video sharing (Youtube), photo sharing (Flicker), instant messaging chat, social event/calendar systems, news aggregation (RSS) and email (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser, 2008; Waters, Canfield, Foster & Hardy, 2011). The social media features will be used in this study to investigate the extent to which organisations employ these features on organisational websites. Social media can be integrated into organisational websites or used as an extension of the main webpage to provide more engaging, interactive, collaborative and dynamic experiences for the user and maintain their reputation. Briones, Kuch, Liu and Jin (2010) and Gordon and Berhow (2009) emphasise the nature of social media can provide useful ways for public relations practitioners to create two way communication with stakeholders.

In New Zealand the proportion of Internet users has increased from 79% to 83% in 2009 meaning more people are accessing and engaging in online activities or communication (Smith, et al., 2010; Mersham, Theunissen, & Peart, 2009). Also Smith et al.'s (2009) study of internet in New Zealand showed five sixths of the 1250 sample size used the internet and posted online images, messages or videos and engaged in popular online activities such as downloading music or videos and playing games. This indicates New Zealanders use on the web is dynamic and multifaceted. Furthermore,

half of the population sample were members on social networking sites (Facebook and Bebo) at the time. The results of the findings suggest New Zealanders are communicating and using the internet and its interactive features. It would be expected that organisations communicate online to stakeholders and wider publics as it becomes essential to reach their audiences and manage their online reputation.

According to the Ministry of Economic Development (2011) and Bradley (2010) a number of organisations have Facebook accounts, fan pages and subject groups. These accounts/ pages/ groups act as a space in which the organisation can begin to create some type of communication between its stakeholders and wider publics. In comparison to the Fortune Global 100 organisations, Twitter was the most popular social media application used, following Facebook fan page (54%) and Youtube (50%) close behind in terms of popularity (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). However, only 20% of the 100 organisations used all four channels - Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and organisational blogs to communicate with their stakeholders (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). The example of Fortune Global 100 organisations shows organisations are willing to engage in social media to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics.

The growing popularity of social media and the capabilities it has is central in this study in understanding how organisational reputation is impacted. According to Mersham, et al. (2009) and Argenti (2006) social media eliminates the barriers of time and space as users can connect with each other within and across boundaries, and communication can be delivered instantaneously and simultaneously in real time communication. The social media environment becomes a place where networks of users can have continuous and constant clusters of two-way communication (Mersham et al., 2009). Broom (2009) emphasises the translation of information is much more volatile online so public relations practitioners have more responsibility for messages and the organisations reputation.

The use of social media has not gone without concern. There are many claims about the value, power and potential impact social media has for organisations and Taylor and Kent (2010) suggest authors need to support scholarly research and methods to

support claims to social media rather than relying on anecdotes. One of the popular claims made and propagated by professional publication is the extent social media constitutes a change, a social revolution or the way people relate with each other (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). Terms used to grasp the attention of organisations with these claims include “vital”, “invaluable”, “a focal point” which are used to describe the urgency and big opportunity for organisations to embrace social media and it is something that cannot be ignored (Aula, 2010; Murphy, 2010; Sheldrake, 2008; DiStaso, McCorkindale & Wright, 2011). Though claims of constitutional change has been associated with new communication technology (e.g. television), a gap exists between the potential of social media and the evidence to prove the argument (Taylor & Kent, 2010). The value of social media is not a given and people need to question the claims that are presented and back them with facts. Like the claims of value, power and potential impact of social media, organisations claim they are engaging in two-way communication to foster dialogue however their page hardly reflects that two-way communication is occurring.

As this study relates to the function of public relations and seeks to understand whether organisations are engaging in social media and two-way communication, the functionalism paradigm best describes the paradigm in which this research is placed. In public relations, the dominant paradigm is functionalism and it is embedded in mainstream public relations. According to L’Etang (2008) paradigms are “sets of assumptions” or “taken-for-granted beliefs” that can be used as a “reference point for disagreement for differing perspectives” (p.10). It acts as a sense-making tool which allows the researcher to interpret information and gives an idea of the supposed norm (L’Etang, 2008). According to Cain (2009) functionalism analyses the function of elements that assist the organisation to perform as an integrated subsystem. Functional issues relate to effectiveness, excellence, evaluation, methods, professionalism, public relation roles and statuses.

The Functionalism approach was developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and is concerned with how management within organisations maintain social order in its best manner (Trujillo & Toth, 1987; Bell & Bell, 1976). In the context of the study, public relations practitioners help the organisation manage the relationship the organisation

has with its stakeholders and publics. The practitioners use communication channels such as websites and social media to manage organisational reputation in the organisations wider environment (hence maintaining the wellbeing of the organisation). Public relations practitioners help the organisation to function as integrated subsystems by maintaining consensus or equilibrium (L'Etang, 2008). Functionalism can be used to analyse how organisations maintain their online reputation on websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). Functionalism is initially focused on a systems approach. A systems approach sees organisations as a living organism (Trujillo & Toth, 1987). Broom (2009) describes a "system as a set of interacting units within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from the environment to achieve and maintain goal states" (p. 188). Systems have boundaries and are interdependent between many systems and subsystems within the environment and this creates a web of connections (L'Etang, 2008). Organisations can be viewed as a system which exists in a complex and dynamic social context. The interacting units can be seen in the organisation-stakeholder relationship within an organisations environment. Organisations can use public relations efforts to manage behaviour and achieve goals. If the goal is to build a sustainable and strong reputation, the organisation can use public relations to strengthen the relationships the organisation has with the publics on websites and social media.

An open systems approach is more favourable for organisations. The approach believes an open and receptive organisation in its external environment can change, respond and adapt to changing circumstances in the environment than a closed and reactive approach (L'Etang, 2008). The role of public relations in an open system organisation is to maintain the organisations relationship with stakeholders by adjusting and adapting them to the changing conditions in social political and economic environments (Broom, 2009; Bowen, Rawlins & Martin, 2010). In this study public relations practitioners can help organisations to adapt and adjust to the relatively new social media features and applications. As these social media features (e.g. Facebook) emphasise on relationships, interactions and two-way communications public relations practitioners can use these features so the organisation can adapt to the more social environment in which its organisation exists. On the other hand, in a

closed system approach organisations do not adapt or adjust to external changes. In reality though, Bowens et al. (2010) states systems cannot be completely closed or relatively open as it is dependent on the sensitivity of the organisation in its external environment. Furthermore, Bowen (2010) highlights closed systems are insensitive to environmental deviations while open systems are more responsive to changes.

Organisational reputation is a concept that has been studied from various perspectives (e.g. cultural representations, financial success, & organisational responsibility) (Aula, 2010), and the study shows there is a lack of consensus in defining, measuring and also to the “answers as to whether (when or how) it can be managed” (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander & Genest, 2001, p. 247; Mersham, et al., 2009). Organisational reputation can be influenced by how an organisation behaves with its stakeholders (Aula, 2010). Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) describe reputation as the collective representation and relative standing of an organisation among its stakeholders and wider environment. Stakeholders and wider publics form opinions and pass judgement on organisations based on organisational past actions, operations in its existing environment, products and services and the quality of its strategies (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Aula, 2010). Stakeholders in this instance are connected to the organisation and are individuals or groups of people the organisation conducts business with whereas publics arise around issues (Bowen, 2010). Both terms are used interchangeably in literature and prove to be difficult to separate at times. For this research study, stakeholders will be mainly used but publics cannot be completely eliminated from the discussion as some publics (e.g. activists) can influence the opinion of others and have an impact as how others perceive the organisation. A strong reputation can reap rewards for the organisation in the form of loyal customers, employees, positive perceptions and increased revenue. The extent a strong reputation can be achieved is in the alignment of the organisations identity and image (see Chapter 2) (Mersham & Sandilands, 2009). In the context of this study the identity and image of the organisation is perceived and interpreted differently by many people whether good or bad, right or wrong. So as reputations are not static but more dynamic and fluid, reputations have the potential to change over time and under different circumstances. Organisations can actively manage their online reputation through organisational websites and social media



platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube). The reputation of an organisation is crucial for its survival and success within its environment.

### **1.3 Fostering two-way communication on websites and social media**

Organisations can foster two way communications in social media to manage organisational reputation. Dialogue is a form of two way communication. In public relations scholarship and ever-evolving internet and social media applications, dialogue has become increasingly used (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2011). According to Kelleher (2009) and Kent and Taylor (1998) dialogue is the exchange process of open and negotiated discussion, ideas and opinions. The definition provided by Kent and Taylor (1998) is a simple interpretation of what dialogue is and ignores the philosophical underpinnings of the abstract concept. Chapter two will have a discussion further about the dialogue concept and how it relates to this study. In the context of this study dialogue is a form of two way communication, understanding that power dynamics exist and the positions of the participants are not the same.

In social media two-way communication is a development from conventional one way communication which was commonly used in mass media communication (Mersham et al., 2009; Waters, 2007). Traditionally public relations communication focused on disseminating and pushing out information – a top-down approach in which communication between the organisation and stakeholders is controlled and managed by public relations practitioners. Common forms organisations used to disseminate messages on social networking sites include press releases, campaign summaries, posting links to external news items about the organisation or its causes, posting announcements to discussion walls and answering questions (Waters et al., 2009). This reflects a closed systems approach and the role of public relations is to promote and preserve a favourable image of the organisation within its environment (Broom, 2009). In this functionary role, public relations practitioners use persuasive communication – a one-way communication form of publicity, press releases and message placements to influence its environment. The excessive control over the environment through the use of more traditional reactive public relations implies the

stakeholders and wider publics absorb the organisations outputs while organisations do not take in the feedback from its environment (Broom, 2009).

According to Henderson and Bowley (2010) Grunig and Grunig's Excellence model of public relations communication proposes and emphasises that two way symmetrical communication is the ideal and most ethical form of communication for public relations. Two-way symmetrical communication is the exchange of information on both sides of the organisation-stakeholder relationship. The ideal of two-way symmetrical communication is however a challenge for public relations practitioners and this is further explained in chapter two of this study. The two-way symmetrical communication reflects an open systems approach and the drawbacks include the approach underplays the structures of power, the expression for organisational action and agency and Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) add this approach 'waters down' the complexity of the communication process as the approach focuses on a planning process for organisations to adapt to its environment and aim to achieve two-way symmetrical communication.

#### **1.4 Aim of research**

The aim of this research is to examine the social media features that have been applied to organisational platforms and examine their attempts to foster two-way communication with stakeholders on the organisational web site and selected social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). The study will investigate the extent to which New Zealand organisations are using social media features including social media technologies and applications to open a real organisation dialogue with their external stakeholders.

The aim of this research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are social media features are applied on organisational websites?

RQ2: To what extent do the organisations employ the dialogic principles of communication on organisational websites and selected social media pages?

RQ3: Are the organisations using two way communications to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics on their websites and social media pages?

In public relations research there is a trend towards investigating the dialogic principles of communication on websites (such as Kent et al., 2003, Ki and Hon, 2006, Taylor et al., 2001 and Park and Reber, 2008). Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework of dialogic principles of communication investigates how organisations build relationships through two way dialogic communication channels (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Briones et al., 2010; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The framework will be used to investigate the usefulness of information, generation of return visits, conservation of visitors, ease of interface and dialogic loop. According to Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) public relations practitioners can foster and facilitate dialogue by establishing procedures and channels of dialogic communication to take place. The presence of the principles (via links and icons) indicates an organisations willingness of to communicate with stakeholders. On social media pages there are independent studies on Facebook and Twitter (Waters et al., 2011) however this study examines the three popular social media pages Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. In New Zealand, social media applications Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are popular tools with Facebook leading in the overall social media category in the country with approximately 1.6 million signed up (Dominion Post, 2010; Robotham, 2010). This study incorporates the websites of the top thirty New Zealand Management magazine organisations for 2010 and selected social media pages. Also the study aims to investigate whether the top thirty New Zealand organisations are using two-way communication. One trend in literature and professional publication is for public relations practitioners to move away from utilising social media as a reactive tool in post crisis communication to utilising social media as a tool for two way communication and foster dialogue (DiStaso & Messner, 2010).

The study of websites in this research is supported by the study conducted by Park and Reber (2008) and their content analysis of 100 Fortune 500 companies' website revealed organisational websites served important publics and fostered dialogic communication through repetitive interactions with them, in hopes to enhance trust and commitment. Although strategically designed websites are important as a channel for dialogic communication to take place (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), Kent, Taylor and

White's (2003) interview with web site decision makers considered web sites as 'b-list' and its main purpose was to establish an online presence rather than establishing effective content. It demonstrated that sites were used as a 'status symbol' or 'image building' function than a relationship building tool (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003, p.73). By classifying websites as 'not as important' or establish it as a presence, suggests the opportunity to appeal to stakeholders is not grasped and web sites are not used to their full potential. As the study was set in 2003, social media had not completely taken off and become as popular as it is now. So the findings of Kent et al.'s (2003) study is not surprising that websites were considered 'b-list' and only used to establish a presence.

The extent organisations can utilise websites and social media effectively is by understanding the dialogic capacity of the webpages to promote dialogue (Park & Reber, 2008). The discussion on website decision makers reveals websites are not being utilised to their full potential to create dialogic communication with their publics and instead used websites as a status symbol or image building tool. The essence as to why websites may have been used this way is to follow what others are doing or what the decision makers thought they should do. Consequently, following others or thinking what should be done means websites are not used effectively as there is a lack of understanding of how to actually use them. Also, the discussion about website decision makers highlighted that public relations practitioners may not be responsible for online communication. The implication of other departments being responsible of how to communicate online is they may not understand how to manage communication to engage stakeholders and wider publics and eventually sustain organisational reputation effectively.

Since social media has taken the forefront in the public, it is interesting to see whether organisations have adopted social media features to engage their stakeholders and wider publics. Jones and DeGrow (2011) have indicated in their study of Fortune 500 homepages: design trends that only few organisations adopted more advanced social media features to foster two-way communications. This study also seek to explore the extent the top thirty websites adopt social media features on their organisational website. Websites and social media pages can appeal to publics/ stakeholders by

posting links to external news sources relevant to the organisation, post photos/videos/audio from the organisation or supporters, and provide a platform for discussion such as a wall or message board (Waters, Burnett, Lamm & Lucas, 2009).

### **1.5 The purpose, delimitations and importance of the research study**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the extent the top thirty New Zealand organisations are utilising their websites and social media pages to interact with stakeholders and wider publics and engage in two-way communication because the macro environment, globalisation and technology have consequently increased the visibility of organisations within its environment (Edwards, 2010). As organisations are in the watchful eye of its stakeholders and wider publics, this visibility imposes the notion of transparency and accountability for organisations due to more aware and active publics. Also the study undertakes a qualitative approach which differs from the number of US authors who L'Etang (2008) state their empirical research has been scientific and predominantly quantitative. The empirical research studies include Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework of dialogic principles of communication which has been used in other studies that focus on American organisations such as American Red Cross (Briones et al., 2010), philanthropy 400 (Waters, 2007) and Fortune 500 in Park and Reber (2008), Rybalko and Seltzer (2010), Ki and Hon (2006), and Seltzer and Mitrook (2007). The studies indicate that mostly American organisations have been used and use the framework of dialogic principles of communication in their research study. This research study offers a New Zealand perspective as New Zealand organisations are studied. This focus helps to differentiate it from the American organisations previously used in research because many of the American organisations are larger in size and operation so the findings may mean different for top New Zealand organisations. By doing so, the study can show how New Zealand organisations are utilising websites and social media.

Delimitations of the research study help define the scope and characteristics that will be used or excluded from this study. New Zealand organisations exclude non-profit organisations are used. The sizes of the organisations in this study vary in size and come from different industries within the country. The study focuses on organisational

websites and social media pages that have a direct link from the main organisational website. A qualitative content analysis using the dialogic principles of communication proposed by Kent & Taylor (1998) are used to investigate the extent organisations use certain features as channels to foster two-way dialogic communications on websites and social media pages. The research only records visible links and icons on websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). However also takes into account the context in which the feature is found and the quality of it. As websites and social media pages constantly are changed and improved for its users, the findings of this study may become obsolete. However, the research provides a snapshot of what is actually occurring in organisations in terms of managing their online reputation.

The research adds to the body of knowledge for public relations practitioners' use of social media and websites. The study highlights the organisations willingness to engage in two way communications with stakeholders and wider publics. In terms of the presence of dialogic principles of communication on websites and social media shows the organisations commitment and willingness to engage with stakeholders and wider publics. The practitioners, academics and also commentators in the fields of social media, public relations and strategic management of online reputation can understand both the theoretical and practical aspect to utilising social media features in organisations. Also as the top New Zealand organisations are used, the findings of this study can help shed light on how organisations are choosing to use websites and social media pages. In addition public relations practitioners can understand how organisations are engaging in social media and the dialogic process. Furthermore, the top New Zealand organisations are well known and dominant players within their small domestic setting and at an international scale. Social media can help establish and build a stronger fan base for these organisations and can be a way for them to manage their online reputation. The research seeks to analyse the features organisations use to engage in a more interactive, collaborative social media environment.

## **1.6 Structure of thesis**

This chapter gives an overview of the nature of social media and organisational reputation. In doing so it briefly reviews the literature, highlighting dialogue and

relationships, measuring and monitoring social media, adoption and utilisation of social media and authenticity. The introduction also sets the tone of the thesis and uses the systems theory to provide a logical framework to view the functions of public relations in an organisation (Bell & Bell, 1976). Chapter two provides a detailed review of the components mentioned above and also further highlights the gap in which this research seeks to fill. In chapter three, the methodology for the research will be explored. Content analysis will be used to examine the top thirty organisations and the features used to foster dialogic communication with their external stakeholders. Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework will be used to measure dialogic communication on organisational websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). The social media features on organisational websites were also examined. Instead of marking the presence of the features present or absent, this study also used latent content to examine the context in which these features were found and the quality of them. The following chapter provides the findings and interpretation of the research while chapter five discusses the implications of the findings, its relationship with theory and its significance for this study. Finally, the last chapter will conclude the research by drawing conclusions from the major findings; address the limitations, implications and recommend research opportunities for professionals, academics, theory and suggestions for future.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Overview**

Social media has pervaded social, political and economic ways of life. It is fundamentally reshaping the public sphere and public communication practices in organisations and is an advancement of internet technology that provides organisations a cost-efficient and accessible way to communicate directly with stakeholders and wider publics (Macnamara, 2010; Wright & Hinson, 2008). According to Cunningham and Hunt (2010) the growing popularity of social media reflects the need for organisations to use social media to protect organisational reputation. Organisations can build and manage their organisational reputation by managing their relationship with stakeholders and wider publics online. Websites are seen as relationship building function for organisations as they can use these websites and social media to manage their relationship with stakeholders and also manage their online reputation. The website acts as a forefront for organisational communication online, as stakeholders can retrieve information about the organisation, its operations including products and services. The chapter discusses social media, organisational reputation, two-way communication and dialogue as a form of two-way communication.

### **2.2 Social media**

Social media is catalysed by web 2.0 technologies which have the capacity for open source creation (ability to create content), and also share and tag information using keywords when searching. Tagging enables people to pull information they want to read and view from any source. Tagged information makes it easier for people to cut through the clutter by searching for labels tagged by like-minded people and allows people to become active participants in dialogue (Mersham et al., 2009). The ability to tag and share information is enabled through the development of Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, Flex, and Google web toolkit (Murugesan, 2007). According to Sinha (2004) and Thackeray et al. (2008) this development of social media increases



the capacity for people to collaborate, participate, share and exchange information or content between and among people in various networks.

Social media platforms act as a democratic space that can be used for expression, building or sustaining relationships, affiliations, and trust (Sheldrake, 2008). It allows thoughts, comments and opinions to be shared with other people who have common interests or are different from themselves (Sheldrake, 2008; Ind & Riodino, 2001; Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). In this sense people are empowered as they are given the freedom to select, create and share information on their own grounds. The essence of freedom allows minority voices and groups a chance to express their ideas and opinions to others. According to Jones, Temperley and Lima (2009) the term 'prosumers' best describes the extent people participate in the production and consumption of online content and are able to control their online experience. While people are empowered with social media and new communication technologies, there are also limitations and restrictions on the extent people are empowered in the online environment. For instance, not everyone can belong to the same networks. There is a vast number of networks that span across geographic boundaries and the capacity to control personal online experiences is restricted by software or application settings and terms of use that inhibit collaboration among people. The notion of control in the online environment is an illusion especially between organisations, stakeholders and wider publics. Rubeinstein and Griffiths (2001) point out organisations filter and manage settings of organisational pages and websites by restricting comments, images or videos that have the potential to harm organisational reputation. This restriction is another way personal choices and democratic capability the web 2.0 environment alludes to fails. In fact Reddington and Francis (2011) highlight organisations can manage what information is available, where it is available and also how it is presented on their websites and social media pages. However, since information can flow freely between networks of people online, organisations are not able to entirely control how their organisation is perceived particularly in the online environment. So one way organisations can manage their identity is by finding opportunities on organisational websites and social media pages to provide information about the organisation and its operations. Reasons as to why organisations venture into social media is unknown

however, social media can be used to reach target publics and manage online communication about the organisation.

### **2.2.1 The nature of social media**

The development of the internet has enabled organisations to exist in a wider environment, consisting of both domestic and global audiences (Bradley, 2010). According to Mersham et al. (2009) social media communication is multi-level and ubiquitous because the time-space boundaries once apparent in traditional media have collapsed. Information is shared between and across geographic boundaries locally and globally. In social media, content is not only derived from management which illustrates a top-down and one way form of communication, instead content can also be two-way such as coming from the bottom-up as customers and employees can produce and share content.

Due to real-time communication, the capacity for people to produce and share content through social media poses a threat for organisations as the rate at which communication can be delivered and shared among people highlights the viral nature of messages, videos and images (Trahan, 2010; Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009). It poses a problem for organisations as content and word of mouth can impact the organisation, its products and services, and reputation positively or negatively. According to Walsh et al. (2009) and Ind and Riodino (2001) the tendency for information to go viral is more intense in the online environment because people have greater impacts on their own social networks (their friends online) and the influence is almost instant when they share and interact in social media environments particularly on Facebook and Twitter. Also there is a possibility that one interaction can have a disproportionate influence across an infinite network (Reddington & Francis, 2011). The disproportionate influence is when information can be shared outside of personal networks. The capacity for information to be shared within and outside social networks makes it incredibly hard for organisations to maintain how people feel and respond to the organisation based on what other people are saying. Organisational reputation can be impacted this way and the discussion shows social media exposes challenges for an organisation to maintain their online reputation especially when

negative communication is left unchecked or unanswered (Cunningham & Hunt, 2010). This shows organisations should be proactive in managing their organisations communication online with stakeholders.

### **2.2.2 Social media features**

Social media features include a range of features that organisations can use to engage with stakeholders and wider public. Social media features include blogs, micro-blogs, social networking (e.g. Facebook), video sharing (e.g. Youtube), photo sharing (e.g. Flickr), wikis, podcasts, webcasts/webinars, social bookmarking (e.g. RSS, XML), chat forums, online gaming, virtual worlds, online newsrooms, e-alerts/newsletters, news aggregation (RSS), social event/calendar systems, search engine optimisation, email and online media monitoring (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008; Eyrich et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2011; Bhargava, 2010). Bhargava's (2010) New Zealand based research on public relations and the internet shows that photo sharing applications, podcasts, wikis and virtual worlds were the least common features public relations practitioners incorporated in their daily tasks. Public relations practitioners tended to use more established features such as e-mail and e-alerts/newsletters more frequently than relatively new social media features. These social media features have common features (Reddington & Francis, 2011). The features enable people to interact, stream public, accessible and searchable conversations and share information beyond their own personal networks.

Social media features such as blogs, chat forums/ message boards, micro-blogging and social networks have the capacity for two-way communication to occur. Blogs can be used as an online diary for purposes to provide news and commentary, descriptions of events and post text, images and links to other websites and blogs. The social media feature can be updated by an individual or a group of people and allows others to leave comments (Wright & Hinson, 2010). In chat forums online discussion can occur on a variety of topics and relationships can be built through the interaction and consistent communication between multiple people online. This can be a form of where dialogue can be achieved. Micro-blogging features such as Twitter are a form of multimedia blogging which allows the user to "send brief text updates or micro-media

(photos or videos)” (Wright & Hinson, 2010, p. 5). Another feature organisations can use for two-way communication is social networks. Facebook is the most popular free-access social networking platform where people participate and collaborate in interactive discussions. Wright and Hinson (2010) state on Facebook, people can share information, messages, blog posts, photos, videos, web links, news stories, music and personal profiles.

Some of the social media features can be used to engage the stakeholders and wider publics on websites and social media pages. Podcasts is an audio or video which can be made available for download via syndication (Wright & Hinson, 2010). Another way organisations can engage their stakeholders is to use video sharing platforms which allows the organisation to upload clips to internet hosting websites. Youtube is the most frequently used video sharing platform. Apart from podcasts and video sharing features, social bookmarking can act as a reference for resources online and enables people to organise, store, manage and search for bookmarks.

Despite the tendency for organisations to adopt social media features, they still tend to use traditional ways to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics. In the study of the design trends on Fortune 500 websites, Jones and DeGrow (2011) found some interactive technologies were uncommon on Fortune 500 homepages. Most common features included links to sign up for email messages or newsletters (20%) and links to newsfeeds (12%) (Jones & DeGrow, 2011). Links to blogs (3%), interactive games and activities (3%) and discussion forums (1%) were rare (Jones & DeGrow, 2011). However in Jones and DeGrow (2011) research study only visible links on the organisational homepages were counted and consequently the low percentage of links to social media pages does not necessarily mean the organisation does not have one. It just means it is not featured on their page. Though when organisations have a direct link to other social media it shows the organisation considers the importance in integrating organisational communication and sees social media pages as an extension of their website. Jones and DeGrow’s (2011) study reveals a lack of adoption of social media features as a way to create two way communication such as the ability for stakeholders or the wider publics to respond to information on a blog or discussion forum. It also showed one way communication is still a common way of engaging

online with stakeholders through newsletters and newsfeeds. Furthermore, social media features cannot predict the quality of an organisation-stakeholder relationship itself, Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2006) argue that the behaviour of the organisation is what determines the quality of the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders. Social media like Facebook and Twitter can be a platform where relationships can be built through two-way communication.

### **2.2.3 Claims in social media**

The emergence of social media has given rise to many claims including about social media constituting a 'sea of change' in the way people relate to each other or a social revolution (Wilcox & Cameron, 2010). Even though some may believe social media constitutes a sea of change, the claim suggests some type of revolutionary change is a given yet sceptics question the extent social media constitutes this change and whether its effect on organisational reputation is instantaneous and far reaching (Taylor & Kent, 2010). Many of the claims do not provide concrete evidence on how social media can benefit public relations practitioners and overall the organisation. In fact, a gap exists in the familiarity with social media, perceived value and use. This gap is evident in public relations departments in America (Lariscy et al., 2009) and is also apparent among New Zealand practitioners (Bhargava, 2010). Curtis et al. (2009) and Macnamara (2010) suggest this gap arises from the lack of good examples for public relations practitioners on the practical implementation of social media features in the organisation, how social media relates to their jobs and the extent social media can be used to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics online. The examples for public relations practitioners come from publications and popular sources that fail to critique the value of social media or even fully understand how to effectively use social media. So a gap also exists in what the people are saying about the potential of social media and what is actually happening in organisations and the public relations field.

### **2.3 Impact of social media on organisational reputation**

Social media forces organisations to be more accountable for their actions otherwise they will face public scrutiny and they are pressured to meeting the expectations of people who call for organisations to appear authentic and have an honest presence (Argenti, 2006). Authenticity and communication are closely tied together. As globalisation and the advancement of technology have increased the visibility of organisations amongst their communities and at a global level, organisations try to communicate authentically in the hopes to make their claims accepted and trusted by stakeholders or wider publics (Edwards, 2010). Communication is important in shaping the stakeholders perception of an organisations authenticity (Harquail, 2011). It is the degree the communication reflects closely to the truth of a certain situation (Harquail, 2011). This highlights that there is an increased scepticism on organisational communication and whether it is authentic.

The focus on one-way communication rather than two-way communication has left stakeholders and publics struggling to assess organisational claims and the truth organisational communication has. Reddington and Francis (2011) suggests one way organisations can instil trust among stakeholders and wider publics is for them to act according to the claims they make. This is important as publics are more active and aware, meaning organisations have increased accountability for their actions and claims made. In an effort for organisations to become authentic, they can become more transparent. Harquail (2011) defines transparency as the extent of how much information is about “organisational actions, decision-making processes, decision criteria and data” are made available to the public (p. 252). The extent to organisations can reveal information on websites and social media pages is restricted. Although transparency is expected from organisations, organisations tend to carefully select the information it wants to reveal. The capacity for organisations to appear open and honest online can lead to a better engagement with target publics to help sustain not only online reputation but overall organisational reputation. It can be said though, that organisations that use social media relatively appear transparent than organisations that do not (Harquail, 2011).

Though organisations cannot control how stakeholders choose to interact with each other and what they share organisations can control their own communication on websites and social media pages. The organisation can provide links to social media via their organisational website so people can ask questions, vent or engage in the content the organisation posts. Social media pages can be an extension of organisational communication.

As the perceptions of the organisation through media coverage, websites and word of mouth can contribute to how one person or a group may feel towards an organisation, it places an importance for organisations to engage in social media as organisational reputation can be influenced in how an organisation behaves with its stakeholders and various publics (Aula, 2010). The role of public relations can help build and maintain organisational reputation through communication channels. In entering social media environments and using its features organisations have the opportunity to interact, create two-way communication and establish relationships with the stakeholder. It is not easy to create dialogue or establish relationships and it is also not easy to manage organisational reputation in the era of social media (DiStaso & Messner, 2010). However, organisations should be aware of the environment in which they exist (Worcester, 2009). Organisations should understand their reputation is a social construct and is constantly are re-created in the minds of their stakeholders. It shows organisations need to shape the perceptions stakeholders and the wider public have in social media. Social media pages and websites are platforms organisations can use to manage direct communication with key stakeholders and wider publics.

### **2.3.1 The lack of adoption of social media**

There is a lack of adoption of social media among public relations practitioners in New Zealand. Organisations are hesitant to use social media applications and are unsure of the contribution social media makes for the organisation. This is strongly emphasised by Bhargava's (2010) study which identified the trends in the application of various internet tools in the public relations practice of New Zealand and the impact these tools have on certain key aspects of the public relations practice. It demonstrated there are reasons as to why social media is not adopted in organisations. According to

Bortree and Seltzer (2009) department and organisational factors inhibit the public relations practitioner's ability to effectively utilise the interactive capacity of the internet. These factors include the lack of understanding the best ways to measure and monitor social media, assumptions made about the users and lack of investment in trained staff.

Organisations have to seek an individual with the right skills to manage the organisational website and social media pages (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Grunig, 2009; Briones et al., 2010). Communication, marketing or publishing experience are preferable over an individual with IT knowledge or young technology savvy individuals (Ms Courtney Lambert, cited in Dominion Post, 2010; Bhargava, 2010; Stuart & Jones, 2004). Bhargava (2010) highlights that even though public relations practitioners as communications people should be responsible for managing online communication, IT people end up controlling the websites as they have more technical knowledge than public relations practitioners. This reflects that the function of public relations on websites and social media pages may be performed by people who do not have the capable skills and knowledge on how best to engage in communications with stakeholders and wider publics. Sterne (2008) sheds light on the type of people who conduct public relations activities in New Zealand. His study focused on the business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand and found the communication function is in the hands of a range of owners with their own philosophies as to how public relations should operate. Sterne (2008) also highlights the communication function was headed by a variety of senior managers who he states added 'strategy' or 'strategic' to their title. This was prevalent in all but one case where the communication function was reported to, or embodied in the CEO. It highlights a range of homes for communication existed in the top 28 out of 200 organisations he studied. It also indicates the people responsible impose their own assumptions as to how best to use the communication function and the right way to conduct public relations in order for effective communication. The assumptions imposed may mean not understanding how to use social media effectively and furthers the gap between how social media is expected to be used and how social media is actually used in organisations. The discussion on who manages websites and social media pages may indicate the reason as to why organisations have employed certain social media or



dialogic principles of communication on their websites. It highlights that although websites and social media pages are mediums public relations practitioners can use to communicate with stakeholders; these pages are managed by other people. As this research study concentrates on the channels used for two-way communication on websites and selected social media pages, the decision-making behind the selection of channels of communication to use or way of communicating on these mediums is not known because this research study only highlights the implementation of organisational decisions. It does show how organisations are choosing to utilise websites and social media pages to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics and are making an effort to manage their reputation.

Organisations feel communicating on social media pages will not reach their target publics. There is a perception social media attracts Gen Y. According to About.com (2011) Gen Y are the people born in the 1980s and later. They are deemed to be more technology savvy and are considered as the “fastest growing segment of today’s workforce” (About.com, 2011). Previous literature supports this perception including Bhargava (2010) who stated public relations practitioners in New Zealand perceived social media as a domain for young people and in fact alienated the older generation. It suggests a gap exists between the young (digital natives) and the old (digital immigrants). Merham et al. (2009) explain digital natives as the people who grew up with the knowledge and access to the internet and the digital immigrants as the people “who knew a world before the internet and are relatively new to its existence and use” (p. 149). This assumption suggests social media is an obstacle for reaching the older generation and is the reason public relations practitioners consequently alienated the older generation because of the lack of understanding their social media usage and also their approval of social media (Briones et al., 2010). Although age does impact internet usage, Smith et al. (2008) and Merham et al. (2009) believe this gap has closed considerably and major discrepancy arises only in the 70+ age bracket for internet usage and 40+ for social media usage. There is a closer gap between the 40+ age group - baby boomers and generation Y’s use of social media. In fact, Merham et al (2009) state older people tend to use social media to keep in touch with their offspring and grandchildren. This highlights the demographic in social media is more diverse than expected (Dominion Post, 2010). As a result of this discussion, the

adoption of social media and engagement of social media within organisations is expected to be low amongst the top thirty New Zealand organisations.

Organisations are unable to see the value of social media and its contribution to the organisations performance. Although, Mersham et al. (2009) state the far-reaching and instantaneous effects of social media and its relative impact on organisational reputation, encourage the need for organisations to monitor and measure the occurrences within the environment, public relations practitioners are unsure how to measure the value of social media and two-way communication for the organisation. In reality Bhargava (2010) revealed New Zealand public relations practitioners are mostly cynical about the methods and procedures of measuring and monitoring social media. According to Bhargava (2010) practitioners believed measurement of social media communication would not be relevant as it did not reflect the 'majority view' or entirely reflect their target publics thought at large. Furthermore, DiStaso et al. (2011) highlighted practitioners also struggle for example, to link social media to sales, employ systematic monitoring, and also determine whether engagement actually provides value for organisations. These are some of the challenges practitioners face in their adoption of social media in organisation

Measuring the communication in social media requires a lot of time, effort and investment in finding the best ways to conduct measuring and monitoring operations. DiStaso et al (2011) emphasises the need to train staff, properly invest resources for social media among stakeholders, optimise community groups and encourage two-way communication to try to serve the community while delivering value to the organisation. There are computational and human analysis methods to measuring and monitoring social media (Mersham et al., 2009). Technorati, Blogpulse, Google alert, Google trends, Google social search are few do-it-yourself services organisations can use to monitor and measure social media activity (Hendry, 2009). Also, a simple search in the Google or Yahoo search engines can trigger results about an organisation and show references made about the organisation and how effectively it is being referred to within social media circles (weblogs, tweets, or Facebook) (Bradley, 2010). Wetzel (2011) adds searching for popular topics or the time of day most posts are produced can help organisations understand and practice better communication. Even though

organisations are bound by the resources they have, organisations should see what fits well with their organisation, select the features that are more relevant and appropriate for the organisations business and use the features in a way that it contributes to organisational objectives. Furthermore, the choice of the social media is dependent on who the organisation is seeking to reach and deliver their message to.

## **2.4 Defining corporate reputation**

Organisational reputation is a complex and intangible construct. The term 'reputation' lacks consensus in its definition, stable and valid reputation measures, and also an answer as to when and how (or even whether) reputation can be managed (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander & Genest, 2001). According to Aula (2010) corporate reputation has been studied from various perspectives such as financial success (Fombrun, 1996), competitiveness (Davis, 2003), corporate responsibility (Willmott, 2001), cultural representations (Karvonen, 1999), risk management (Larkin, 2003), and measurement (e.g. Caruana, 1997; Caruana, Pitt & Berthon, 1995; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Lewis, 2001). In literature, most authors agree with Fombrun's (1996) definition of corporate reputation which is the collective representation and relative standing of an organisation among its stakeholders and wider environment. However, like Schwaiger (2004) believes cognitive components should be added to the definition to describe reputation as an attitudinal construct but many definitions like Fombrun's (1996) leave this out. Cognitive measures have been used to measure organisational reputation. Fortune's annual America's Most Admired Companies survey is the best known illustrator of cognitive measure (Davis, 2011). According to Davis (2011) it has been a key "data source used to explore and argue positive linkages between reputation and financial performance" (p. 51). However Davis (2011) states the Fortune rankings faced poor face validity as the results did not represent customers and employees who create the business performance instead the study was an evaluation of the opinions of analysts and senior executives. As a result, the rankings did not explain or reflect what was happening in the current market (Davis, 2011).

Despite a lack of agreement about the definition of corporate reputation, the term describes a 'snapshot' and 'collective representation' of the image/ personal

judgement of an organisations' stakeholders (internal and external) have of the organisation (Fombrun, 1996, cited in Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Syed Alwi & Da Silva, 2007; Budd, 1994). The agreement between authors is that organisational reputation is a 'collective phenomenon' and revolves around given groups (the stakeholders and wider publics) who make personal judgements about the organisation (e.g. Rose & Thomsen, 2004; Weiss, 2004; Anderson & McInnis, 1999 cited in Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson & Beatty, 2009; Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011). These personal judgements are perceptions or mental association's stakeholders have of the organisations past actions, operations, product and services for example (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Aula, 2010; Raithel et al., 2011). According to Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) and Iwu-Egwuonwu (2011) organisational reputation is the relative standing both internally and externally with stakeholders, its competition and institutional environments. If the majority of the images held of the organisation are positive, consistent, trustworthy, reliable and competitive, Mersham and Sandilands (2009) state the organisation has an identity that is aligned with its image and the organisation has a strong reputation.

Organisational reputation is hard to measure and also difficult to isolate from the other factors that shape transaction outcomes (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011). Raithel et al. (2011) provides a list of nine attributes. These attributes are financial soundness, long-term investment value, use of organisational assets, innovativeness, quality of the organisation's management, quality of its products and services, ability to attract, develop and keep attracted people, acknowledgement of social responsibility and effectiveness in doing business globally (Davis, 2011). The attributes vary from author to author but it is evident that the majority of the attributes are apparent in other authors' measurements of organisational reputation (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011). In stating this, it is simple to judge whether an organisation has a positive or negative reputation however, there different ways in which authors study reputation. As reputation is no longer just maintained through traditional channels for example television and radio, organisations are pressured into moving into relatively new online communication channels to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics. In the light of new online communication channels, organisations are encouraged to use two-way

communication to build more meaningful and stronger relationships with their target publics.

#### **2.4.1 Internal and external stakeholders**

Organisations have internal and external stakeholders. The organisation communicates messages to its different types of stakeholders and wider publics on its organisational website. Stakeholders are considered as the most important groups for organisations as they are invested in the organisation and impact the organisations well-being of the organisation. Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2006) state individuals and groups affect the organisations strategic decisions and behaviours. The very consequence of conducting business creates stakeholders which are part of organisational life the organisation recognises them or not (Bowen, 2010). According to Gotsi and Wilson (2001) Internal stakeholders (e.g. employees, management, shareholders) are affected by the organisation's vision, culture, formal policies and marketing media and external stakeholders include customers, investors, and suppliers. Stakeholders are an important aspect for any business as organisations depend on them and generally the environment for several resources (Bowen et al., 2010). From a marketing perspective and relative to a profit-making business the customers of an organisation are a key stakeholder group. Walsh et al (2009) state the organisation receives revenue streams from customers who buy their products and services. The organisation is able to benefit from two-way communication with them as the organisation is able to not only understand their target publics but also build a relationship with target publics, gain loyalty and draw the target publics into the organisations community.

#### **2.4.2 Image and Identity**

Websites and social media spaces can be a way organisations can manage their identity and overall reputation. Barnett et al. (2006) and Walsh et al. (2009) describe identity as the backbone of the organisations reputation and it is expressed through how the organisation operates financially, socially, economically and environmentally (Walsh et al., 2009; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Organisational identity is a shared set of beliefs about the values, standards, purpose, practices and distinctiveness of an

organisation. The identity is what the organisation defines itself to be and delivers that identity to others. Logos, mission and vision statements, organisational name are part of the symbolism which helps distinguish an organisation from another – creating its identity (Cornelius, 2011). For example, Beal and Strauss (2008) claim an organisational overview is one way the organisation can communicate to their stakeholders and wider publics through providing a chance for others to learn about the organisation, and organisations can paint a story through images, video and sound to show their personality and also promote the organisations best features in the overall website. Identity and reputation is a social construction. Social construction is the notion that organisational identity and reputation are constantly created, modified and co-created in the minds of the stakeholders and wider publics. Reputation is not static but fluid and dynamic, meaning reputations should be actively worked at (Mersham et al., 2009). This construction helps differentiate the organisation's position in the eyes of important stakeholder groups (Cornelius, 2011). This leads to image which is influenced by the organisations actions, behaviour and communication in and outside the organisations environment.

Image is an impression a person makes of the organisation (Barnett et al., 2006). According to Barnett et al. (2006) it is what comes to mind when the person hears the name or sees the organisations logo. The function of public relations, marketing and other organisational processes helps conduct the transition from organisational identity to image (Barnett et al., 2006). Organisations attempt to shape the impression people have of their organisation through communicating messages to stakeholders and wider publics via communication channels such as websites and social media pages.

Media coverage, sponsored communication, word of mouth, governmental regulations and surveillance, industry dynamics and other external forces are factors that influence the impressions people have of the organisation (Barnett et al., 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Syed Alwi & Da Silva, 2007; Davis, 2011). According to Christensen and Askegaard (2001) identity and image are interrelated. Both identity and image are social constructs and are constantly changing. Stakeholders and wider publics create their realities and culture and are involved in a dynamic process in which their social

worlds go through the constant creation, amending and reconstruction of meanings that are influenced by the managed communication on websites and social media pages. Organisations manage their organisational reputation by communicating their identity via websites and social media pages. Public relations practitioners can manage how the organisation is perceived through managing the organisation's communication and behaviour within its environment (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006).

Corporate reputation is a valuable and intangible but highly fragile asset and is affected by the operations of each business unit and stakeholders (Gibson, Gonzales & Castanon, 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Chun, 2005; Budd, 1994; Serbanica & Popescu, 2009). Also, Harris (2001) believes organisational reputation demands priority in contemporary organisations as more emphasis is placed on the strategic management of online reputation. By prioritising an organisations reputation, it minimises the risks (e.g. a crises) which can consequently impact the local positioning, competitiveness of the organisation, legitimacy of operations and even the licence for organisations to exist (Aula, 2010). According to Harris (2011) bad reputations can be the result of managers having a myopic view of their environment and do not believe in accountability or deliverability to environment in which it operates. This inhibits the organisation from noticing the issues that surround the organisation and ignores ways in which the organisation can improve.

Although literature indicates relevance of organisational reputation in its ability to influence stakeholder behaviour towards the organisation, it remains relatively understudied (Barnett et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2009). Barnett et al. (2006) states organisational reputation is 'seldom' noticed until they are threatened and suggests it cannot be ignored because organisational reputation is ubiquitous. Public relations have the responsibility to assist the organisation in managing its reputation and a way this can be done is by engaging in interactive, dynamic and collaborative tools. When organisations do so, the organisation is seen as keeping up with the trend and shows a willingness and interest of the organisation to interact with their target publics.

## **2.5 Fostering two-way communication in the online environment**

Authors such as Bradley (2010), Dzamic (2009), Monseau (2009), Robotham (2010) Harquail (2011) and Kent and Taylor (2002) place importance for organisations to take part in more interpersonal communication in the social media especially since the most relevant communications is the one which takes place between the organisation and stakeholders (Dzamic, 2009). In literature, the terms interpersonal communication, two-way symmetrical communication, conversation and dialogue are used loosely and interchangeably. The terms used to describe two-way communication provides some confusion in definition and usage within context as the terms do not all mean the same thing. The following discussion will highlight some of these terms.

Grunig's four models of communication can be used to show the type of communication public relations practitioners can use. According to Tymson, Lazar and Lazar (2006) and Grunig and Hunt (1984) the models of communication have moved from one to two way communication. Press agency and public information are one way forms of communication public relations practitioners can use and is based on the writing and technical skills of public relations practitioners in words, images, websites and media relations (Bowen et al., 2010). Press agency is interested in generating publicity for the organisation and there is little regard for the truth while public information is more concerned about presenting the truthful facts in information to stakeholders and wider publics. Whereas two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric promote two-way communication and is encouraged for organisations to adopt in a more dynamic, complex and social context. Though public relations is in favour of two-way communication, Bowens et al. (2010) state in modern public relations practitioners use a mix of the models in their tactics and communication tools for a public relations campaign. So it is fair to say both one-way and two-way communication can be used effectively to achieve organisational objectives.

Two way asymmetric is a form of scientific persuasion; it is imbalanced as communication is in favour of the organisation (Tymson et al., 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Grunig and Hunt (1984) state the aim of two-way asymmetric communication is to change public attitudes and behaviour instead of changing the organisation as a



result of public relations. It suggests communication is planned and managed in order to achieve the change in public attitudes and behaviour. On websites and social media pages the organisation can choose to use communication in two-way asymmetric to manage and sustain a favourable organisational reputation. Organisations can learn and understand what their stakeholders or target publics want and use the information to distribute organisational messages to them. Bowens, Rawlins and Martin (2010) state that two-way asymmetrical communication is unbalanced and is in the favour of the communicator as the communicator attempts to persuade their stakeholders and wider publics by selecting and distributing messages or content that would resonate with them. In this instance, the communicator wants the stakeholders and wider publics to adopt the attitudes and beliefs that are favourable to the organisation.

Two-way symmetrical communication on the other hand, is what Grunig and Hunt (1984) describe as more of a dialogue rather than a monologue. Tymson et al. (2006) state the symmetry in this type of two-way communication is balanced and used to gain mutual understanding in the organisation-stakeholder relationship. Furthermore, two-way symmetrical communication is based on dialogue where a relationship can be built on interaction and Cain (2009) points out it is in this interaction where both participants can engage in decision-making processes and share ideas. The two-way symmetrical model of communication is the ideal and most ethical form of communication for public relations practitioners. The communication model reflects an open systems approach and is placed within the excellence model of public relations. Grunig and Grunig's (1992) excellence model of public relations demonstrates a process in which communication reaches consensus and emphasises mutual understanding (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006; Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Waters, 2007; Cain, 2009). The model has drawn significant criticism from public relations academics and practitioners as it creates an unrealistic expectations for communication between an organisation and its stakeholders or wider publics, and also fails to address the practicalities of implementing the two-way symmetrical approach (Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Grunig, Grunig & dozier, 2006). The notion of symmetry in the communication is difficult to achieve because symmetry denotes that the participants in the communication exchange are equal. This is not true as there are

factors shaping interaction such as power dynamics and covert agendas. According to Harquail (2011) the power dynamics between the organisation and the stakeholders prevent two-way symmetrical communication. Although social media interactions are two-way they lack symmetry as there is a power play in the arena of communication (Christensen et al., 2008; Harquail, 2011). For example Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) state the organisation and the individual do not have similar rights and responsibilities. The power disparity between the organisation and stakeholder makes it a challenge for two-way symmetrical communication to occur.

Another reason as to why two-way symmetrical communication is difficult to implement is due to the organisational culture and their grasp of being in control. Bhargava (2010) states New Zealand follows a culture that is rooted in a control paradigm and there is a perception and fear that engaging in an open dialogue in social media will only result in negative outcomes. Also, organisations are exposed with both internal and external crises, when participating in social media. Internally there is a challenge or fear of criticism of management, embarrassing employee behaviour, intellectual property leakages and anything that may conflict with the organisations intentions, beliefs or values (DiStaso et al., 2011; Henderson & Bowley, 2010). Apart from internal challenges, there are external concerns prevalent. DiStaso et al. (2011) stated organisations felt criticism, false information and activist groups were its biggest concerns in the social environment. These internal and external challenges or concerns have potential to damage an organisations reputation. It shows a level of trust and the willingness to take risks are required for organisations to engage in social media (Mersham et al., 2009). In order for organisations to utilise the opportunity for engagement they would have to change their culture by relinquishing the control they have.

Since the practicality of implementing two-way symmetrical communication is a challenge, public relation practitioners tend to use social media in a similar fashion to traditional media. Traditional media include broadcast media (e.g. television and radio) where communication is uni-directional and mass oriented. Also Grunig (2009) emphasises practitioners continue to use social media to push out promotional messages (e.g. media placements) as evidence communication has occurred. In fact in

Eyrich et al. (2009) study which measured the adoption of social media by public relations practitioners, practitioners were more inclined to use more traditional tools as opposed to technologically complicated channels such as social networks, virtual worlds or text messaging. As mentioned previously, effort, time and the investment in these resources are some of the reasons for the continuing to use social media as traditional tools. Also, the discussion on two-way symmetrical communication does not suggest one-way types of communication should be ignored; the discussion highlights that even though there is a trend for organisations to engage in two-way communication, one-way communication is still seen as a legitimate way for organisations to communicate.

Two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue are not the same. Dialogue is a form of two way communication and organisations can use websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube) to foster dialogue through using channels and procedures of dialogic communication. Dialogue is a form of two-way communication where an organisation listens and responds to the concerns and interests of its key stakeholders such as customers, employees and investors (Roper, 2005; Harquail, 2011). Public relations scholars have referred to dialogue as many things such as a 'dialectic', 'discourse' and a 'process' with little consistency in its usage. In this literature review, dialogue is a communicative orientation and a social process that cannot be achieved in the first instance of interaction rather it has to be on-going and sustained to eventuate in dialogue and further into an organisation-stakeholder relationship (Kelleher, 2009; Heath et al., 2006; Aula, 2010)

The concept of dialogue is however linked and "deeply rooted in philosophy and relational communication theory" (Kent & Taylor, p. 21). However, Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) acknowledge that there is a lack of clear philosophical understanding of dialogue theory and despite the usage of the terms, Kent and Taylor (2002) in public relations the discussion of online communication between stakeholders is a step toward "understanding how organisations can build relationships to serve organisational and public interests" (p. 21). Organisations are able to directly communicate and engage with stakeholders and wider publics. Social media facilitates the capacity for organisations to interact personally – one to one. The

notion of engaging in dialogue seems to be a good idea however it is a challenge for public relations practitioners to create the conditions necessary for dialogue on websites and social media pages. Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) suggest dialogue is difficult to operationalize and foster as it is abstract in concept and there is a lack of ways in which public relations practitioners can create conditions for dialogue to thrive. On websites and particularly social media pages, public relations practitioners may find it difficult to utilise two-way communication to foster dialogue amongst organisational stakeholders and wider publics.

When people bring their own ideas and topics to the communication exchange it may prevent people from listening neutrally. Like two-way symmetrical communication, when an organisation attempts to engage in dialogue the organisation may have hidden motives which create tensions between being open to outcomes different from what the organisation intended and achieving organisational objectives. This is apparent in the communication between an organisation and its stakeholders. An organisation may not be as open to negotiate business objectives or protocols when trying to solve a customer's problem. The organisation may have specific outcomes in mind which motivates them to engage in dialogue e.g. to solve a problem or improve an existing situation (Heath et al., 2006). It indicates although it may seem organisations may be listening to a person's concern the organisation has ulterior motives that drive them to or encourage the organisation to pretend to engage in dialogue. Furthermore, even though organisations cannot control the outcome of communication exchange and achieve their objectives, organisations try to limit the unpredictable outcomes. The preparedness of organisations to manage unpredictable outcomes shows organisations may be willing to engage in dialogue however for dialogue to eventuate on websites and social media seems unlikely because dialogue outcomes cannot be controlled. Also, Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) highlight there is tension between systems theory and the notion of dialogue. The systems theory refers to the role of public relations in its environment is to maintain goal states which refers to control and management of organisation-stakeholder relationship. Whereas through the exchange of opinions and ideas in dialogue requires organisations to relinquish some of the control they have to achieve the desired outcome. In stating this, organisations cannot achieve their goal states or desired

outcomes in dialogue, as dialogue is unpredictable and organisations cannot always achieve their outcomes. Therefore, for organisations to succeed in dialogue the notion of control has to be absent.

There are structural and ideological constraints that can shape both reality and dialogue itself (Heath et al., 2006). There is a need for practitioners to deconstruct these type of constraints to better understand the context in which communication is taking place and also realise how best to approach the dialogue in a multicultural society (Heath et al., 2006). Organisations have to be careful in how they respond to questions or interact with people online. This includes using manners, being culturally sensitive and more aware of how people can interpret messages differently. By understanding the structural and ideological constraints Heath et al. (2006) suggests would help avoid replicating or aggravating structural problems and social divides.

In the quest for two-way communication, organisations can utilise websites and social media pages to directly communicate and build relationships with stakeholders and wider publics. Websites and social media pages are platforms the organisation can use to manage their identity and understand how others see their organisation. Due to the increase of new communication technologies such as social media, organisations are encouraged to participate in the social media environment, engage with and talking with their target publics. An organisations effort or willingness to engage in social media shows an organisations concern for understanding their stakeholders and wider publics and also highlights the organisations effort to maintain their online reputation. However, from the discussion, the implementation of two-way communication or dialogue is a challenge for organisations and public relations practitioners on websites and social media pages.

Dialogue is not a panacea as it has the potential to disguise covert agendas or power relations (Heath et al., 2006). The interests and priorities of an organisation and its stakeholders may not always be aligned (Davis, 2011). Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) state organisations are motivated by profit, gaining competitive advantage, improving operational efficiency, and promoting the values and acceptance of these values through communication. This demonstrates organisations main intentions are

to utilise persuasive communication to achieve their objectives. In support of Theunissen and Wan Noordin's (2011) point on organisations being motivated by profit, in Sinclair and Vogus's (2011) research study on how social media is being used among 72 organisations, the authors found the organisations used social media – Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn in eight ways. These eight ways includes building brand loyalty, promoting a company, product or brand, using social media to defend the company against attacks, product improvement or product development, to build external communities of followers, build internal communities (such as employees), to promote a social cause, or educate customers on a specific topic or technologies (Sinclair & Vogus, 2011). The example demonstrates that organisations have certain intentions when engaging in social media, none of the reasons as to why organisations use social media was to foster dialogue. Instead the reasons suggested organisations are more interested in fulfilling their own objectives either to inform customers on a specific product, or to promote or build a community.

According to Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) organisations have a choice on whether to foster dialogue or not. In New Zealand, organisations such as Vodafone, Air New Zealand and ASB use Twitter to communicate with their customers (Ministry of Economic Development, 2011). The organisations use their presence to offer deals and respond to customer enquiries. Here, two-way communication is evident in how the organisation listens and responds to the customer enquiries online however, the use of deals signifies a promotion for the organisation about their products or services. Vodafone, Air New Zealand are choosing to not use Twitter to foster two-way communication but as a way Hendry (2009) states engage their 'followers' around their business and answer questions about organisational products and services. The attempts to foster two-way communication with individual stakeholders can add value to the communication exchange as messages are tailored to each individual (De Chernatony, 2001; Dzamic, 2009). But the interaction of these organisations does not reflect dialogue because using Twitter as a customer service tool shows two-way communication is short-lived rather than continuous and sustained. As organisations are not required to engage in dialogue, Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) state the assumption for organisations wanting to participate in dialogue could be because the organisation wants to build relationships with online stakeholders or to be seen as engaging in dialogue.

Fostering dialogue with stakeholders is becoming important as there is a proliferation of media channels and a fragmented audience (Gordon & Berhow, 2009). Also, there is an increasing expectation from publics and stakeholders that organisations engage in discussion. It is not an easily operationalized approach or can be reduced to series of steps. There are several implicit and explicit assumptions that underlie the concept of dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The tenets which encompass these assumptions are mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The extent to which these tenets are applied or are evident in the organisations communication demonstrates the willingness of organisations to engage in dialogue. Mutuality refers to the recognition of organisation-public relationships; propinquity relates to a rhetorical exchange between organisations and stakeholders and highlights the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Where a communication interaction is taking place, a supportive and trustful environment condition is needed and the organisation is willing to risk engaging with stakeholders and wider publics on their own terms. In addition organisations are faced with risk when engaging in dialogue as the communication can often produces unexpected outcomes. To minimise the risk organisations try to limit the unpredictable outcomes. One way organisations reduce the risk is usually by state terms of participation. This is evident in social media pages that establish the policy of the page stating that participants should refrain from certain types of behaviour and language. When organisations do this, it provides a structure to the communication process on what is deemed acceptable and the behaviour that will not be tolerated. The last tenet is the extent to which “the organisation gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions” with stakeholders and wider publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 29).

An ethical form of dialogue is when trust, honesty and positive regard for the other person is apparent rather than using dialogue as a means to an end (Kent & Taylor, 2002). A more ethical form of dialogue is difficult to achieve as organisations do have motives when attempting to foster dialogue around their business. Also online communication such as websites and social media pages cannot be used itself to foster dialogue, instead the platforms should be used alongside knowledge and

understanding of how best to apply dialogic communication with the platforms available (Park & Reber, 2008).

### **2.5.1 The dialogic principles of communication**

Kent and Taylor (1998) believe the online environment is ideal to foster dialogue and their study in 1998 investigates how organisations adopt two-way communication channels to build relationships on the internet. Kent and Taylor (1998) designed five principles which are organised into two clusters – technical and design, and the dialogic cluster. The five principles are ease of interface, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, conservation of visitors and dialogue loop. The limitation of this framework is that some features tend to fit in more than one place. An update of the principles is required as it is quite out-dated as Kent and Taylor designed the five dialogic principles of communication in 1998. The principles and types of features in each principle need to be expanded, redefined and moulded to include social media features and different online environments. Another limitation is the extent these features eventuate into dialogue is unknown. According to Kent and Taylor (1998) the ease of interface determines how easily the user can navigate the site without slow graphics or disorganised information. The usefulness of information principle explores the extent information is tailored and used to appeal to stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Waters et al., 2011). The generation of return visits is the extent users are given incentives to return to the website over time. Waters et al. (2011) suggests a reason to return to a website is to provide visually appealing and dynamic content. However, Waters et al. (2011) highlights visually appealing and dynamic websites are not that popular on websites, neither are blogs or social networking sites and the evidence is supported by the low scores of this principle in studies such as McAllister-Greve (2005) and Seltzer and Mitrook (2007). Lastly the dialogic loop provides opportunities for users to query organisations and organisations to provide feedback (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Interaction is important in this loop and Waters et al. (2011) suggests a trained organisational representative should be available to close the loop. To close the loop suggests responding to an enquiry or comment a person makes to the organisation online.



A representative of the organisation can use their role to mediate between the interests of the organisation and stakeholders. According to Harquail (2011) this helps to bridge the gap between positions and develop an understanding of each other. The individual acts as the voice behind the name, symbol, icon, character or avatar that is used to represent the person and the organisation during interaction with stakeholders and wider publics. When a representative is unnamed and anonymous, Harquail (2011) states it violates the person-to-person norms of social media and may lack enough presence for the employee to create a relationship with stakeholders (p. 256). It highlights a personable or human touch which makes communication appear less detached from the organisation and less daunting for the stakeholder.

Furthermore, Beal and Strauss (2008) suggest representatives use various communication techniques to engage their target public. The techniques include using a personable and informal tone than a defensive and arrogant attitude to garner more respect in the online environment. Representatives are encouraged to write in second person than first or third person. Second person writing style situates the reader within the content and is seen as interactive whereas first person shows the writer to be more superior to the reader and third person beckons a much formal and impersonal tone which may not help the representative engage the user. So representatives should be cautious of how they communicate with other users on their organisational website and particularly on social media pages as the way they communicate influences how an organisations stakeholders and wider publics receives it. In addition Waters et al. (2011) states simple responses such as “thanks for your feedback” can indicate the organisation is responding and can show that the organisation is attentive to the needs of the person. However, the simple response does not indicate dialogue has occurred as the communication between the two participants is cut short and back and forth interaction is not evident. If this is how organisations use social media, dialogue is not apparent and two-way communication is not used effectively. Despite this, the interaction exemplified by the dialogic loop creates a relationship with the stakeholder and publics, establishes trust and in a sense lays the foundations for true dialogue to occur.

## 2.6 Websites

Websites can facilitate dialogue by establishing channels and procedures for two-way communication. Organisations can communicate directly with the customers, the media, and investors on both websites and social media pages. In using websites and social media pages organisations can be viewed and better understood. A strategically designed website can be used to establish a relationship with stakeholders and remains the best source of information (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Bradley, 2010; Murphy, 2010). Kent and Taylor (1998) add web sites should be dynamic enough to encourage potential publics to explore them, information rich enough to meet the needs of very diverse publics, and interactive enough to allow users to pursue further informational issues and dialogic relationships. In fact when organisations satisfy the information needs and information seeking habits of their stakeholder and publics, it provides reasons to why organisational websites and social media pages should be visited (Mersham et al., 2009).

The dialogic principles of communication presented by Kent and Taylor (1998) can be used to investigate the extent these websites provide useful information, conserve the visitor, provide reasons for the visitor to return, have a feedback or dialogue loop and are easy to use. The dialogic principles of communication do not indicate that just because the website exists, people are guaranteed to visit, download or comment on organisational websites (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). Pollach (2011) agrees with Wimmer and Dommick (2006) and reiterates organisations face difficulty in making sure their messages reach their target audience. Online audiences have the capacity to choose where they get their information from, having more control over what they want to see, the messages organisations send may not reach the intended audience (Pollach, 2011). It makes it difficult for organisation as they have to work harder to make sure they do. In order for organisations to attract and keep stakeholders and wider publics, websites and social media pages should contain more engaging content that would appeal to them. Organisations are pressured to deal with the proliferation of new communication channels and challenges. Websites are now moving away from static pages to provide more multimedia, dynamic and interactive experiences (Mersham et al., 2009; Rubeinstein & Griffiths, 2001). Static web browsers displayed

information and generated little feedback, were read only and lacked the opportunity to engage in long-term dialogue (Henderson & Bowley, 2010). But, the implementation of social media features and multimedia on organisational websites are still far from standardised or widespread despite the encouragement and recommendations of using social media in literature (Jones & DeGrow, 2011).

## **2.7 Summary**

The literature review highlights it is the role of the public relations practice to manage organisational reputation through managing the relationships between the organisation and their stakeholders. Practitioners use social media features as an extension of their responsibility to manage these relationships with stakeholders online. However, public relations cannot function in the same way as it did with traditional media – one way communication. This is the result of social media changing the manner in which society consumes news and information, to the capacity for two-way communication, real-time communication, and the capacity for people to participate, collaborate, produce and exchange.

Organisations have the opportunity to establish channels and procedures to foster two-way communication with their stakeholders. As noted in the literature review fostering dialogue and the use of social media is becoming a growing discussion for organisations and public relations practitioners. Even though there's a trend towards social media and two-way communication, a gap exists in how organisations use social media and what others claim social media is used for. From a New Zealand perspective, this study aims to investigate whether the top New Zealand organisations are utilising social media and to examine if their organisational websites and social media pages establish channels and procedures for two-way communication. This research study seeks to provide an understanding of how organisations are engaging in social media and the dialogic process. Furthermore, when organisations use social media it is presumed organisations care about what their stakeholders and wider publics are saying and therefore, engage in social media to protect and manage organisational reputation.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Overview**

Chapter three discusses the research method for the research study and outlines the process of how data will be gathered. A qualitative approach is used to examine the adoption of social media in New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations for 2010 and investigate the channels and procedures used to foster two-way communication on organisational websites and social media pages. To conduct this research study, a qualitative content analysis is used to collect primary data from websites and selected social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). Chapter three will provide a theoretical discussion on the philosophical perspective in the study and explain qualitative content analysis as a research method. Also, the research process will be discussed including the selection of sample, operational definitions, the coding process and implementation of the process and lastly explain the data collection and analysis for this research study. From the discussion of the research method and research process, the summary will emphasise the suitability of the chosen research method to the entirety of the study.

The research proposes to fulfil the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are social media features applied on organisational websites?

RQ2: To what extent do the organisations employ the dialogic principles of communication on organisational websites and social media pages?

RQ3: Are the organisations using two way communications to communicate with their stakeholders and wider publics on websites and social media pages?

### **3.2 A discussion on interpretive paradigm**

The research paradigm has a great influence on the research methods the researcher uses. According to Wimmer and Dommick (2006) a paradigm is an "accepted set of theories, procedures, and assumptions about how researchers look at the world" (p. 113). Interpretive, positivist and critical perspectives are three paradigms that help

researchers look at the world. The three perspectives differ in terms of the philosophies of reality, the position of the individual and their aims of research. Interpretive researchers are concerned with meanings rather than measurements and therefore employ qualitative research methods, whereas positivist researchers focus on statistical analysis, numerical measurement and usually seek to conduct research to understand cause and effect, to predict behaviour or affirm universal patterns that can explain communicative behaviour (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Unlike positivist and interpretive perspectives, Daymon and Holloway (2011) describe critical perspective as being rooted in neo-Marxist and Marxist thoughts and concerned with challenging conventions and norms, revealing hidden agendas and highlighting inequalities and power.

This research study adheres to an interpretative paradigm. According to Wimmer and Dommick (2006) this perspective aims to understand how people create meaning and interpret the events of their world. The meanings are created during interactions and by the interpretation people give to those interactions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In research study, the researcher exists as part of the research and meanings are construed by the researchers' own experiences, behaviour, communication and way of looking at the world. As an interpretive researcher Daymon and Holloway (2011) suggest critical self-awareness is important. Since interpretive researchers are perceived as existing only in reference to the observer and the observer creates reality as part of the research process, researchers in this perspective are subjective. By being critical self-aware entails understanding how one's own experiences, behaviour, communication and way of looking at the world have an influence on the meaning and interpretation of situations, elements and also data. A way for researchers to be critical self-aware is to state and examine their own location within the research. For this research, the researcher is positioned as a participant-observer, and the observation of websites and selected social media pages is from the perspective of a user of the internet. From this position in the research, the researcher's presence is concealed while interaction is occurring in selected social media pages and website administrators will not be approached or interrupted. Hence, this type of position within the research helps maintain the principle of unobtrusive research while the researcher collects primary data on the adoption of social media on organisational

website and examine the channels and procedures for two-way communication on organisational websites and selected social media pages.

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) interpretive perspective was developed to directly challenge positivism. Unlike the subjectivity interpretive researchers place on research, positivist researchers believe in an objective reality and exist independent of the researcher therefore avoiding the intrusion of personal values and own biases in the research. Here, it is assumed the researcher maintains an independent and objective stance from the study by only being interested in the interrelationship of the objects being studied. In this instance, the researcher believes the objects will remain present, before and after the research, and the main focus is on their research objects as the researcher is detached from their study. Although the research process is value free as the researcher does not impose their own view on the research object, it is difficult to achieve objectivity because the researcher becomes part of what is observed, bringing in their own values and interests to the research. Collis and Hussey (2003) state this is a drawback for positivists as it is hard for people to separate themselves from their social context and research objects cannot be understood without the perceptions the researcher has on their own activities.

Unlike positivist researchers, interpretivists welcome their own values and interests to the entire research process. By doing so, interpretivists add value and meaning to the data and content in which they are found. However, it is important to note that interpretive researchers may not come to the same interpretations of the data as multiple realities exist. People as well as researchers will interpret the data differently and also produce different meanings because a researcher's outlook in the world is perceived differently. The explanation on social reality and the position of the researcher within the research process highlights from an interpretive perspective people cannot be pigeonholed and are fundamentally different from one another. People cannot be placed in one category because human beings are not similar and their behaviours or feelings cannot be summarised (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006).

Also, reality is internally experienced and exists in the minds of people and reflects the notion of social construction. The process of social construction occurs when the

researcher introduces their values and interests and internalises and gives meaning to the phenomena being studied. The researcher is able to make sense of the context through their interpretation of the data. Here the interpretation is not similar to the meaning another researcher would give to the same research. However, Daymon and Holloway (2011) highlight that the outcome of research is provisional because the process in understanding the phenomena is never complete as understanding with time and place might change.

The subjective approach in interpretive perspective makes it hard to generalise findings to other settings and situations. For example, Daymon and Holloway (2011) state it is hard to generalise about the function of public relations from documents. The documents such as websites and social media are subjective and are “produced by people whose motives may be to persuade, put a spin on information or to represent only a particular viewpoint” (Daymon & Holloway, 2011, p. 282). However, the intentions of public relations practitioners on these websites and selected social media pages are unknown as the research study examines the decisions made on websites and selected social media pages. Also, on these websites and selected social media pages it is difficult to generalise that the communication on these pages are performed by public relations practitioners as the role may be performed by other organisational staff members such as marketers and IT staff. To reiterate this point, Collis and Hussey (2003) emphasise that the purpose other than which the data is being used for may be different from what the researcher intended. Facebook is a social space where organisations can engage in two-way communication to foster dialogue however organisations may not intend to foster dialogue but to seek to promote or raise the awareness or new products and services. Though this may be the case, the focus of websites and selected social media pages in this research study does highlight the organisations understanding of a) engaging in social media and b) the dialogic process. Also, since websites and social media pages are spaces organisations can use to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics about the organisation and its operations, it is fair to say the motive of communication may be to present information about the organisation in a way that would appeal to their target publics. Even though interpretive research may be subjective, researchers strive for depth in research study in an attempt to produce a unique explanation about a given situation

or individual (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). The depth in research study is achieved by the holistic reality interpretive researchers have and the belief that reality cannot be divided allows the researcher to understand the entire research process. However by focusing on rich descriptions, interpretive researchers tend to face the common challenge of their conclusions being too restricted. Though this may be the case, the interpretive perspective is more suitable for this research as positivist researchers tends to ignore more relevant and interesting findings due to their quantification, hypotheses and objective measures. Furthermore, Collis and Hussey (2003) state a single measure as evidence in positivist research studies cannot be an accurate measure of a person or object being studied and shows why positivist researchers may find it difficult to conduct or capture complex phenomena. The discussion on the interpretive perspective lays the foundation in which a qualitative content analysis is undertaken for this research process. The type of approach taken will influence how research is collected and analysed.

### **3.3 Content analysis as a research method**

#### **3.3.1 Background to content analysis**

According to Stacks (2002) content analysis is commonly used in public relations research. Neuendorf (2002) and Elo and Kynäs (2008) add content analysis has a long history use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology and business, and during the last few decades its use has shown steady growth. It is a technique known to have originated as early as 1740 to analyse communication (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Content analysis can also be traced to World War II when “allied intelligence units painstakingly monitored the number and types of popular songs played on European radio stations” (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006, p. 150). The music played on German radio stations was compared with other stations in occupied Europe. The allies used content analysis to measure the changes in troop concentration on the continent. Though, in the era of social media and new communication technologies, the use of content analysis as a research method has extended to online visual, written and multimedia content such as websites, message boards and chat rooms. In fact, online research provides a much accessible medium for researchers as the internet is low-



cost to use, has access to a number of people across geographic boundaries and lastly most published material online is for public consumption.

### **3.3.2 Definition of content analysis**

There are many definitions of content analysis which make it theoretically and practically difficult to understand and implement (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The lack of a firm definition and set of procedures have potentially limited the application of content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Researchers may assume content analysis is only about counting the frequency of present and absent object however the lack of definition allows the researcher to define how the method will be used in a specific research study. Content analysis is a method of social research and one of the few methods which can be employed quantitatively or qualitatively, allowing an array of methodological possibilities (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). It can be “conceptualised as a mixed method of analysis” or a method that can contain the possibility of both qualitative and quantitative applications (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 286). As content analysis is a flexible yet complex and difficult research method because it is less standardised and formulaic, Elo and Kynäs (2008) emphasise the researcher is solely responsible in judging which variations of the research method are more appropriate for their particular research problems. Qualitative content analysis is appropriate for this research to investigate the social media features that organisations adopt on their organisational website and also examine the extent organisations attempt to foster dialogue in both the organisational website and social media pages. The research will identify whether organisations are willing to engage in two way communication in social media and whether they embrace this relatively new channel.

Both manifest and latent content coding procedures can be used in content analysis. Sarantakos (1998) states the types of coding can be employed separately or in combination in the same study. Manifest content refers to words, sentence paragraphs, specific features that are visible and appear on the surface text or actual parts of the text. Although this is more accurately viewed as a quantitative approach, it becomes qualitative when the researcher goes on to identify alternative terms using

latent content such as descriptions or interpreting the content and evaluating the quality of it (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This research study not only counts the presence of visible features at the manifest level but uses latent content to explore the content and quality of the data on websites and selected social media pages. Daymon and Holloway (2002 cited in Wimmer and Dommick, 2006) suggests the trend to a more qualitative content analysis has become popular among public relations research and in one aspect due to public relations practitioners shift from their focus from one-way communication and control to dialogue and collaboration. This shift means organisations must hear, appreciate, understand and identify who they are talking to – these tasks Wimmer and Dommick (2006) state are best addressed by qualitative methods. This research study will include elements of descriptive statistics – a quantitative research method, to provide averages, frequencies and percentages to add to the interpretation and analysis of the data.

In content analysis, data collection and analysis of the data can be done manually or through technical software on computers such as NVivo and SPSS programs. The computer software is upgraded annually and is available to help the researcher process, summarise and analyse the data that has to be collected (Collis & Hussey, 2003). These software packages include Minitab and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The software programs assist the researcher to tabulate variables that have been prepared for the computer, read the text and to identify occurrences within the data (Sarantakos, 1998; Neuendorf, 2002). However, the researcher will have to determine the format in which the program is expected to find the required data. SPSS is data file consisting of a worksheet where the data can be stored and is supported by a number of menu-driven commands (Collis & Hussey, 2003). While Nvivo is a qualitative analysis program that is used for interpretation and content analysis.

### **3.3.3 Advantages of content analysis**

There are advantages to content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In content analysis there are no pressures of time constraints with content analysis like that associated with interviews and observations (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The researcher has the ability to conduct the research when he/she wishes (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Another

advantage of content analysis is that the method is unobtrusive and nonreactive method to studying the phenomenon of interest (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The unobtrusive nature of content analysis means the phenomena being studied are not affected and aware of the researcher's interests. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) emphasise that the unobtrusive methods "developed out of the assumption that we can learn about our society by investigating the material items produced within the culture" (p. 286). The analysis of websites is unobtrusive and nonreactive in nature meaning the researcher doesn't have to actively engage with others. The data is "naturalistic" on organisational websites and is not influenced through researcher interaction (Hesse-biber & Leavy, 2006). This means the researcher has no contact with organisational administrators (Sarantakos, 1998). Content analysis incurs no problems with access and is relatively inexpensive compared with other methods that are time consuming and bias such as surveys (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Sarantakos, 1998). Organisational websites and social media pages are accessible, readily available and free public documents. The people who place information on websites and social media pages know that it can be looked at and used by anyone who wishes. So the researcher is able to observe the interactions and implementation of organisational decisions on websites and selected social media pages.

### **3.3.4 Disadvantages of content analysis**

There are disadvantages to qualitative content analysis method. There can be omissions in public documents so that the sample may be incomplete such as deleted posts and unwanted comments on social media pages (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Other disadvantages of qualitative content analysis is the method largely depends on the quality of the data being analysed, it does take time and is at times tedious, and difficult to answer the 'why' questions when content analysis is employed alone. Also, it is hard to represent all organisational websites when a small sample is drawn for this study. The sample does not reflect all organisations as it includes commercial and profit seeking organisations therefore excluding non-profit organisations (Sarantakos, 1998; Cavana et al., 2001). In addition, in qualitative content analysis there may be coder bias as researchers' personal idiosyncrasies and biases can enter into the findings (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). Also, as mentioned in qualitative research,

Wimmer and Dommick (2006) emphasise that the interpretive researchers' personal idiosyncrasies and biases can enter into the research process causing coder bias. This subjectivity is unavoidable in interpretive research study as the research process is designed to suit the aims and objectives of their study and subjectivity is evident in the entire research process such as specifying the units of analysis and the operational definitions.

Content analysis requires a process of data reduction at an early stage of the research. According to Collis and Hussey (2003). Large amounts of data can be discarded when only recording the words or phrases that are of the researcher's interest (Collis & Hussey, 2003). As this study employs little quantification, the quantification process has a tendency to blind the researcher of other ways of assessing the potential impact of effect of content (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). For example, the researcher can assume that the most frequent occurring element in the data is the most important, though it may not be the case. In assuming this, the researcher may discard data which may be helpful for the researcher to understand the phenomenon more thorough and at a deeper level (Collis & Hussey, 2003). This demonstrates the quality of content analysis is largely due to quality of text being analysed. In this study, the process discussed can be avoided as the researcher has control over which types of latent content to include or exclude depending on the research objectives. A disadvantage most evident in the qualitative content analysis of websites and selected social media pages is that layouts and content of these pages are constantly being changed or upgraded. This means the researcher must ensure the data collection is done in a short period. Hence this research study shows a snapshot of the organisational decisions implemented on websites and selected social media pages over a short period of time.

### **3.4 Sampling**

The next step in the research process is sampling, where the researcher must decide on the rationale for extracting a sample if there is a large volume of written, oral or visual data existing (Collis & Hussey, 2003). According to Sarantakos (1998) sampling is the process of choosing the units of the target population which the researcher wants to include in their study. Collis and Hussey (2003) define a sample as a subset of a

population and represent the main interest of study. This population includes a group or class of subjects, variables, or phenomena. As the entire population cannot be studied due to time and resource constraints a subset of the population is derived to represent the entire population (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006).

This study uses New Zealand organisations to conduct research. Since the study cannot include all the New Zealand organisations to be studied and this study seeks to investigate how the top organisations in New Zealand are adopting social media and two-way communication, the top 200 organisations published in New Zealand Management magazine for 2010 is selected. The magazine's annual list is regarded as "one of New Zealand's business community's most highly respected sources of information" (Mediaweb, 2011). It provides a list of New Zealand's largest organisations including "New Zealand subsidiaries and local branches of overseas organisations, producer boards, cooperatives, local authority trading enterprises and state-owned enterprises that operate as limited liability organisations" (Mediaweb, 2011). These organisations are profit seeking and commercial. In this list the authors select the organisations based on ten criterion such as revenue, profit after tax, return on revenue, total assets, total equity, and total employees and exclude other organisations e.g. organisations that are fully owned by another New Zealand organisation. It is also important to note some of the organisations in the list are only 50% New Zealand and includes multinationals. The selection of the annual list of New Zealand organisation is derived from a ranking that is well-accepted in New Zealand and has been used in New Zealand literature (e.g. Sterne, 2008) on his research of business perceptions of public relations in New Zealand.

### **3.4.1 Sampling Size**

Due to the nature of qualitative content analysis and the focus of depth in the research process, a purposeful or purposive sampling procedure is applied. Purposive sampling is a non-probable sample and it does not follow guidelines of mathematical probability (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). This is different to probable sampling as each unit's chance for selection is known using mathematical guidelines (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). In probability sampling the researcher is able to calculate the sampling error

present. This does not occur in non-probability and Wimmer and Dommick (2006) state this type of sampling method is frequently used by mass media researchers, particularly in the form of purposive samples, available samples, and samples using volunteers.

Purposive or judgement sampling is suited for this type of research and is used for exploratory and qualitative analysis (Sarantakos, 1998). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) emphasise that qualitative researchers often select purposive or judgement samples because of the particular research questions and also the consideration in the resources available to the researcher. This research study seeks to understand what the top New Zealand organisations are doing to manage their reputation in an ever increasing interactive and collaborative environment. In an attempt to find a list of organisations to conduct research, New Zealand Management magazine seemed most suitable for the research as the publication is written for leaders and managers, dealing with topics from leadership, management, economic issues and best practice advice for career development and organisational leadership (Mediaweb, 2011). The New Zealand Management magazine's top 200 organisations are published annually. As purposive sampling is used, the researcher makes the decision on the number respondents or objects that is sufficient for the research study (Sarantakos, 1998; Neuendorf, 2002). When purposive sampling is used the researcher must ensure the sample size is clearly defined and how the objects of study will be applied in the research process. A drawback to purposive sampling is it may not reflect the total population and be representative as a result of subjective selection.

The sample size of thirty organisations is drawn from the top 200 organisations in the year ending 2010. There are a number of determinants in choosing the sample size. According to Wimmer and Dommick (2006) determining an adequate sample size is one of the most controversial aspects of sampling as there is no simple answer. Like choosing the type of sample, the researcher depends on at least one of the following in choosing the size of the sample: type of research study, purpose, complexity of the research study, amount of error tolerated, time constraints, financial constraints and previous research in the area (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). Also Collis and Hussey (2003) believe the researcher needs to decide how accurate he/she wants the results

to be and there is need for some indication of the “anticipated response, possibly taken from previous studies or a pilot survey the researcher has conducted” (p. 159). This shows the sample size should be evaluated in the context of the study (Sarantakos, 1998). In the context of this study, purposive sampling is used to narrow down the number of organisations used for the research. The selection of thirty organisations from the list of 200 is due to the time frame of this study (12 months) and to focus on gaining a much richer understanding of the adoption of social media in organisations and also the channels and procedures for two-way communication on organisational websites and selected social media pages. A selection of a sample size from a created list of organisations is not uncommon in public relations research. In similar instances, the Fortune 500 companies have been selected by many authors (e.g. Ki & Hon, 2006; Kim, Park & Wertz, 2010; McCorkindale, 2010; Park & Reber, 2008; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010) to conduct research regarding social media and public relations. This sample size provides a list of organisations that come from different industries – communications/media, retail/wholesale, construction/infrastructure, oil/gas/mineral/electricity/water and primary production. In addition, it is expected the top organisations are adopting social media and two-way communication in their organisation. This stems from the growing pressure domestically and globally as more people are engaging in social media and are more collaborative and interactive.

### **3.4.2 Sampling unit**

In this study, the organisational websites of the top thirty organisations is used as the sampling units. The population of 200 organisations were available to choose from. The organisational websites act as the forefront of the organisation where their stakeholders and wider public can access and retrieve information about the organisation and its operations. According to Murphy (2010) and Bradley (2010) the website remains as the best source of information, as even in the advent of social media, websites provide detailed information about the organisation and its operations. It acts as a controlled channel of communication for organisations (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; White & Raman, 2000). Kent and Taylor (2002) state organisations can use the website and social media to reinforce their commitment to two-way communication and foster more interaction with stakeholders and wider

publics. On organisational websites, the media, customers and investors are mainly targeted. Websites are expected to be more dynamic, interactive and include multimedia and organisations should consider making these websites as a top priority despite the reality of organisations dealing with fragmented, complex, time constrained and interactive pressures both inside and outside of the organisation. In prioritising websites at the top of the 'to-do' list Beal and Strauss (2008) suggest organisations can manage their identity by communicating accurate, consistent and up-to-date information to sustain their organisational identity.

### **3.5 Coding**

The coding employed in content analysis depends on the content the study is referring to (Sarantakos, 1998). According to Sarantakos (1998) coding is the "assignment of codes" to the units identified in the study (p. 283). The units are used to indicate the presence of one of the categories with the text. This can be a single word or symbol, theme, items, sentences, characters in written content (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006; Collis & Hussey, 2003). The placing of the unit of analysis into a content category is called coding and the individual who does the coding is called the coder (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coder will record the presence of the units on the organisational website. A symbol [v] will be used to indicate the presence of the dialogic features of communication.

The coding units are derived from a review of scholarly literature on the adoption of social media in organisations, and a review of the top ten organisational websites and social media pages. From the review of literature in the previous chapter, fourteen social media features and Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework for dialogic communication is applied in this study. According to Thackeray et al. (2008), Eyrich et al. (2008) and Waters et al. (2011) the social media features that will be used this research study are blogs, micro-blogs, social networking (e.g. Facebook), video sharing (e.g. Youtube), photo sharing (e.g. Flickr), wikis, podcasts, webcasts/ webinars, social bookmarking (e.g. RSS, XML), chat forums, online gaming, virtual worlds, email, e-alerts/ newsletters. Also, Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of communication framework will examine the features that can be used as channels to foster two-way



communication. There are five dialogic principles of communication in this framework: ease of interface, dialogic loop, generation of return visits, conservation of visitors, and useful information. The units from Kent and Taylor's (1998) study are used in this research (see Appendix A) but as the framework is out-dated and have not been updated, further units are added to the principles. The addition of further units is a judgment call and is based on my role as participant-observer - a user of the internet.

**Table 3.1 Kent & Taylors (1998) five dialogic principles of communication**

Principle	Definition
Ease of Interface	The simplicity for users to navigate the site
Conservation of visitors	The extent users can be encouraged to stay on the website
Generation of return visits	The extent users are given incentives to return to the website over time
Useful information	The extent information is tailored to stakeholders e.g. media, customers, investors
Dialogic Loop	Opportunities for users to query organisations and organisations to provide feedback

The last principle (dialogic loop) was adapted to suit the research and reflect a more mutually exclusive and exhaustive set of dialogic principles of communication. The dialogue loop was adapted to the study to see whether organisations were responsive to stakeholders and wider publics on websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube) through the use of two way communication. Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) emphasises previous research has considered it important to assess the actual responsiveness of organisations. This is the attempt where the organisation poses a question to stimulate dialogue and the organisation responding directly to a question or comment by the user. When the organisation responds to a comment or question, the organisation is seen as closing the feedback loop in the interaction. It also shows whether the organisation initiates two way communications with the stakeholders and wider publics.

### 3.5.1 Operational definitions

Qualitative research is mainly inductive and follows a spiral model of research design. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) the spiral model of research design allows the researcher to generate new understandings, with varied levels of specificity, “during each phase of the research and uses the information to double back and gain more information” (p. 289). Inductive content analysis includes organising the qualitative data – the open coding process, construction of categories and abstraction (Elo & Kynäs, 2008). Although qualitative research is associated with inductive analysis, Daymon and Holloway (2011) argue there are times when qualitative data analysis can start out with deductive analysis. When deductive analysis is used at the start the researcher begins the analysis with a loose idea of some predefined areas of interest and explicitly looks for data (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic principles of communication are used to establish more explicit categories for the outset of the coding process. In this study, some features evident in the dialogic principles of communication (see Appendix B and C) were selected from the literature review in chapter two and placed into the appropriate principle. The five dialogic principles of communication must be clearly defined and thorough to make them accurate, exhaustive, reliable and mutually exclusive (Sarantakos, 1998; Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). A mutually exclusive set of principles means that features under each principle cannot be found in another principle; otherwise the principles will not be mutually exclusive, reliable or accurate. Wimmer and Dommick (2006) suggest the features should be revised if certain units fall simultaneously into two principles. This is to ensure that the criterion is easily observed and problems within the content are identified.

In qualitative study, validity is more important than reliability in the research. Reliability is the extent the same measuring procedures can yield the same results on repeated trials (Neuendorf, 2002). According to Neuendorf (2002) this is the ability for another person to conduct the same study and be able to achieve the same results as the researcher and is a way to validate the research. However, since qualitative research is embedded in the interpretive paradigm, reliability is hard to achieve due to the subjective nature of qualitative research. Daymon and Holloway (2011) state it is

hard for other researchers to achieve the same results even in similar cases and conditions as the background and characteristics of the researcher influences how data is interpreted and how the researcher arrives at their conclusions. Instead, Daymon and Holloway (2011) suggest interpretive researchers opt for credibility in their research by providing convincing evidence for the claims made in the research. Stacks (2002), Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Daymon and Holloway (2011) argue the interpretive researcher can clarify the quality of the research study by ensuring that the steps taken in the research process is carefully articulated, ensure that the evidence and conclusions will stand up to the closest scrutiny and provide readers the ability to find meaning in their own social context. In this research study, the literature review and findings will be used to support and provide strong arguments for the conclusions made.

The validity of the research needs to be considered. The validity in qualitative research ensures the data collected is free from manipulation, interference and contamination (Sarantakos, 1998). It is the extent the research findings accurately reflect what is actually happening in the situation or context (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The validity in research is important as research errors can occur such as faulty research procedures, poor samples and inaccurate or misleading measurements which can undermine the validity of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2003). There are ways in which the researcher can maintain validity of the study. There are a number of measures that can be applied for researchers to find the strength of their study (Sarantakos, 1998). Sarantakos (1998) provides three validation techniques: cumulative, communicative and argumentative measures. According to Sarantakos (1998) cumulative validation is the extent the research study can be supported by other studies, here the researcher can make a comparison of the various findings and make a judgement on the validity of the study. Communicative validation seeks to use additional questioning of the respondents to validate the research findings (Sarantakos, 1998). Lastly, the argumentative validity measure is described by Sarantakos (1998) as when conclusions can be followed and tested in the presentation of research findings. Cumulative validation is more appropriate for the findings of the research as it can be supported by others who have applied the framework in their study. Kent & Taylor's (1998) framework has been applied to several studies such as those by Park & Reber (2008),

Seltzer & Mitrook (2007), and Taylor, Kent & White (2001). The framework has also been applied in different types of organisations such as non-profit, university websites, Fortune 500 organisations, congressional websites and blogs (McAllister-Spooner, 2009). This can aid the researcher in aligning the findings of the research to those listed above.

### **3.5.3 Coding schedule and coding manual**

A coding scheme is constructed to guide coders to make decisions in the analysis of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is a translation device that organises data into categories and includes the process and rules of data analysis that are systematic, logical and scientific (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coder can classify the data by placing check marks or slashes in predetermined spaces (Wimmer & Dommick, 2006). A good coding scheme is central to reliability in research using content analysis. There are three coding schedules in the coding manual (see Appendix A, B, C). The first schedule is social media features which will be used to investigate the extent the features are adopted in the thirty organisational websites. Second, the principles of Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework of dialogic communication is used to examine the extent these dialogic principles of communication are observable in the thirty organisational websites and third coding schedule also uses Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of communication but are adapted to suit the social media environment of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. For instance, the social media spaces Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have different features from organisational webpages, so features such as names and photos of page administrators is added under the usefulness of information. The principle 'ease of interface' which is how easily the user can navigate through the site and search for information was not investigated on the social media pages. The ease of interface is pre-determined by the provider e.g. Facebook layouts are consistent throughout all their pages but is structurally different from Twitter and Youtube and it would be a challenge to examine the set of features under the ease of interface principles across all three types of social media and also falls outside the scope of research since the organisation is not responsible for the layout and presentation of social media pages, it is a given by the other organisations that create them.

### **3.6 Data collection**

According to Collis and Hussey (2003) the data collection process is determined by the analytical requirements of the research study and overall purpose of their research. For this research study a qualitative content analysis is used to mark the presence of social media features and the dialogic principles of communication observed on organisational websites and selected social media pages. A qualitative research is achieved when the data collection goes beyond counting the manifest content and uses latent content to understand the context in which the features are used and the quality of them.

#### **3.6.1 Preliminary study**

Initially there was some consideration in extending the sample size from thirty to seventy organisations for this study. The findings of the original sample size demonstrated nine of the thirty organisations as having a direct link to social media pages in Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. An effort to extend the sample size to 70 organisations only revealed the links increased by another eight links to social media pages. This made the total 16 of the 70 organisations as having a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube with direct links from organisational websites. It signified a low adoption of Facebook, Twitter and Youtube out of the 70 organisations. The assumption can be made that these organisations did not consider the value of engaging in these platforms to foster two-way communication and build relationships with stakeholders. As the increase in these direct links was minimal, it was decided the sample size will remain at thirty organisations to explore the extent social media features are used on organisational websites and to explore the extent dialogic principles of communication are used on organisational websites and selected social media to foster two-way communication with stakeholders and wider publics.

### **3.6.2 Main study**

The data collection in this research study was conducted manually during the first week of October (Oct 1<sup>st</sup> – Oct 5<sup>th</sup> 2011). Google was used to find the official website for the thirty organisations. On the websites the social media features and dialogic principles of communication were identified and recorded. If the features were not visibly apparent on the website the feature would be considered as absent. In the collection of data on the websites the date of posts were checked and the types of content other than the features selected for this research was recorded such as the type of videos or audio displayed and the placement of the links and icons on the website. Following this, the links to Facebook, Twitter and Youtube were followed if the organisation had an icon or link on their organisational website. When Facebook, Twitter or Youtube icons are found on the organisations homepage, it ensures the user the social media accounts are verified and owned by the organisation. The presence of icons on organisational homepages helps the user identify the real organisational page from a fake one. On the social media pages the date of posts were checked for the frequency of activity by the organisation and an overview of the type of content presented was noted such as the type of posts, statements made by the organisation and person. The posts were also checked to see whether the administration staff responded to queries people had concerning in the organisation.

The parameters of the study are the links on the main page are observed to see if the features are available. If the feature is not apparent on the main page, the sitemap and search are used to locate the feature.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

At times it is difficult to distinguish between the methods of collection and the methods of analysis. Collis and Hussey (2003) add the data collection method can also be the basis on which it is analysed. The discussion in this chapter highlights content analysis as a research method which can be shaped to suit the type of study the researcher is hoping to conduct. There is no clear and accepted set of convention for analysis. When the frequency of links are counted in the text it is part of the analysis

technique and is used for the purpose of understanding what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe as the contextual use of the links or content. As reiterated throughout this chapter, a qualitative content analysis in this research study will investigate the context and quality of the features organisations use on organisational websites and selected social media pages. As there is flexibility in how data can be collected and analysed, descriptive statistics is used to certain extent and is a technique that describes data and is useful for summarising and presenting the findings in tables, charts, graphs and diagrammatic forms (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Although descriptive statistics is usually applied as a statistical analysis to the data and includes central tendency measures such as percentages, means, modes and medians of the data, descriptive statistics is used to present the findings in tables, figures and percentages. The use of descriptive statistics will add to the interpretation and presentation of the data.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter explored content analysis as a qualitative research method. The chapter provides a theoretical discussion on the philosophical perspective, methodology, sample size, coding procedures, examination of reliability and validity, and also data collection and analysis techniques. Qualitative content analysis in this research study uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect and analyse the data. Descriptive statistics is used to show results of the study through figures and tables that show frequencies, percentages and comparisons among the organisations and the features they have. The purpose of the research method is to collect data that reflects the actual practices of social media on organisational websites and to examine the extent organisations attempt to two-way communication.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **4.1 Overview**

The qualitative content analysis research method discussed in chapter three was used to collect primary data from thirty New Zealand organisational websites and selected social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). Organisations can utilise websites and selected social media pages as spaces to manage organisational identity. On websites and selected social media pages, channels and procedures for two-way communication can be set up to engage and interact with external stakeholders and wider publics in the online environment. To collect the data, a Google search was done to obtain websites for each of the organisations during 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Kent and Taylor's dialogic principles of communication for the online environment are examined on organisational websites and social media pages. These features fall under the five principles of dialogic communication: dialogic loop, ease of interface, generation of return visits, conservation of visitors and usefulness of information. The following chapter presents the findings of the research study and reveals the extent social media features are applied on organisational websites, extent organisations employ dialogic principles of communication on organisational websites and selected social media pages and highlights whether organisations are using two-way communication with external stakeholders and wider publics. Chapter four seeks to use tables and figures to highlight the findings in the research study and support the interpretation of data.

### **4.2 Social media features on New Zealand Management's top thirty organisational websites**

This research examined the websites of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations in 2010 and their adoption of social media features. From the review of literature in Chapter 2 fourteen social media features are used in this study and includes, blogs, micro-blogs, social networking, video sharing, photo-sharing, wikis, podcasts, webcasts or webinars, social bookmarking, chat rooms, online gaming, virtual worlds, e-alerts or newsletters and email. The following features were observed on each of the organisational websites to examine the extent the top New Zealand



organisations integrate social media features on their website. The list of social media features is separated from the elements within the principles of dialogic communication to maintain mutually exclusive principles in Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of online communication.

Table 4.1 highlights the social media features apparent on the websites of New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations. The social media features were observed on each organisational website and a tick [v] was used to mark the presence of the feature while the absence of the feature was left blank. Table 4.1 shows Vodafone used the most social media features ranging from chat forums and blogs to Youtube, Facebook and Twitter.

**Table 4.1: The social media features on New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations**

New Zealand Management top 30 organisations 2010	Social media features													
	Blogs	Micro-blogs	Social Networking	Video sharing	Photo sharing	Wikis	Podcasts	Webcasts/webinars	Social bookmarking	Chat forums	Online gaming	Virtual worlds	E-alerts/ Newsletters	Email
1 Fonterra Co-operative Group (Auckland)		✓							✓				✓	
2 Fletcher Building (Auckland)									✓				✓	✓
3 Telecom Corporation of new Zealand (Wellington)		✓	✓	✓									✓	✓
4 Woolworths New Zealand Group (Auckland)								✓					✓	✓
5 Air New Zealand		✓	✓	✓				✓						
6 Foodstuffs (Auckland)									✓					
7 Shell New Zealand Holding Company (Wellington)									✓					✓
8 BP New Zealand Holdings (Wellington)													✓	✓
9 Foodstuffs South Island (Christchurch)														✓
10 Foodstuffs (Wellington) Co-operative Lower Hutt														
11 Contact Energy Wellington								✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
12 Fulton Hogan Christchurch														✓
13 Chevron New Zealand (Auckland)									✓		✓		✓	✓
14 Silver Fern Farms (Dunedin)														✓
15 Meridian Energy (Wellington)													✓	
16 Infratil (Wellington)			✓										✓	✓
17 Genesis Power (Auckland)			✓											
18 ExxonMobil New Zealand Holdings (Auckland)														
19 The Warehouse Group			✓					✓					✓	✓
20 Vodafone New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓			✓	
21 ZESPRI Group											✓			✓
22 Mighty River Power								✓					✓	
23 Alliance Group														✓
24 Nuplex Industries								✓						
25 Ebos Group														✓
26 New Zealand Post	✓	✓		✓					✓				✓	✓
27 Vector		✓							✓		✓		✓	✓
28 ANZCO Foods														✓
29 Goodman Fielder New Zealand								✓					✓	✓
30 PGG Wrightson														✓

From the data in Table 4.1, not many of the 14 social media features are apparent on the top thirty organisations. Vodafone's intent to adopt more social media features

may be to reflect their young image and appeal to a younger target public. Air New Zealand, New Zealand Post, Vector and Contact Energy are other organisations that adopted more than three social media features on their websites, while at least one social media feature is used in less than half of the organisations. Exxon Mobil NZ had no social media features and Foodstuffs Cooperative did not appear to have any as no website was available. Figure 4.1 supports Table 4.1 as it shows which social media features are commonly used on organisational websites.

**Figure 4.1: The usage of social media features on New Zealand Management’s top thirty organisations**

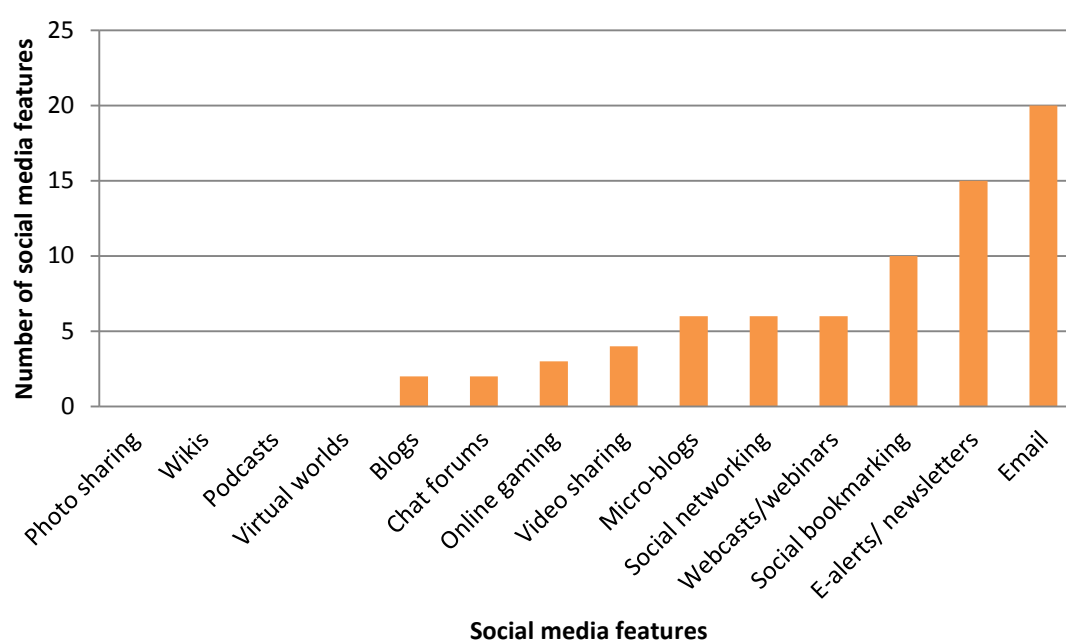


Figure 4.1 reveals organisations are more inclined to use certain social media features such as email and e-alerts or newsletters rather than photo sharing applications, wikis, podcasts and virtual world. Two thirds of organisations had email and half of the organisations offered newsletters for their publics. Few organisations utilised blogs and chat forums while none of the websites included photo sharing, wiki, podcasts and virtual worlds. The tendency for organisations to favour certain features over others may be the result of integrating the feature into organisational objectives, adapting to trends in the wider environment, lack of understanding how the features can provide value and using the feature effectively, and lack of organisational resources. For example, organisations have internal and external barriers that may prevent the adoption of social media features in New Zealand organisations. The internal barriers

(also highlighted in the literature review in chapter two) include organisational resources such as time. Time is a major factor limiting organisations adoption of social media features. Social media features such as webcasts, chat forums and blogs would need to be monitored and updated regularly to meet the expectations people have of organisations to deliver information and responses in a timely manner. However, it can be said that the more common features apparent on organisational websites like email and e-alerts or newsletters hardly reflect the interactive and collaborative nature of social media but it does highlight organisations still use traditional ways to communicate with external stakeholders and wider publics. Apart from email and e-alerts or newsletters, organisations included social bookmarking in the form of RSS feeds (really simple syndication) for people to keep track of news updates and enable people to share documents with the placement of the “share” application at the top or bottom of a document. The features allow people to share the document within their own networks via other social media (Digg, Facebook, and Twitter) and email. In observing the top thirty organisations, it was noted that organisations also integrated other types of new communication technology such as Skype or social network LinkedIn. Fulton Hogan uses Skype to offer prospective employees the opportunity to communicate with career managers during office hours. Here Fulton Hogan is using Skype as a way to use two-way communication to directly communicate with their external stakeholders. By using Skype for chat, Fulton Hogan offers a real-time feedback and convenience for their external stakeholders and wider publics.

#### **4.3 Dialogic principles of communication on social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube)**

Along with the observation of social media features on the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations, social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube) apparent on organisational websites was selected and analysed for the purpose of investigating the dialogic principles of communication of these selected social media pages. From the organisations that use Facebook, Twitter or Youtube, it is presumed that they care about what their stakeholders and wider publics saying and therefore, engage in social media to protect and manage organisational reputation.

On the selected social media pages, Kent and Taylor's dialogic principles of communication are used and adapted to suit the social media platform. From the thirty organisations used in this study, only nine organisations utilised Facebook, Twitter or Youtube and had a direct link to the specific page via the organisations homepage. The nine organisations are Fonterra, Telecom, Air NZ, Vodafone NZ, Genesis Energy, The Warehouse, NZ Post, and Vector, and Infratil. The icons for Facebook, Twitter and Youtube pages were usually positioned on the bottom right of organisational websites. By placing the icons at the bottom of the page, it detracts the importance of the social pages to the organisation as users are unable to immediately notice that the organisation has social media pages. Presumably, a better placement for the icons would be to place them at the top so the user would be able to quickly identify and access the social media pages. By choosing to place the social media icons at the top rather than at the bottom can raise the awareness of the available pages and may increase the number of people to join and participate in the organisations social media pages. Other positions for Facebook, Twitter and Youtube icons were also found in the bottom left of webpages and placed at the top right. To encourage people to click on the icons, Vector, The Warehouse and Telecom used certain phrases such as "follow us" or "find us on" to invite people to click and participate on the organisations social media page(s). When organisations used phrases it suggests organisations are encouraging the person to engage in further discussion or more likely become part of the organisations online community.

In the study of the dialogic principles of communication on social media pages, the ease of interface was not investigated on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Unlike organisational websites that have more conventional features across the different organisational websites, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube however, have different layouts and interfaces. All organisations with direct links to Facebook, Twitter or Youtube pages were checked to see whether each feature in the principle was present and then recorded for the types of content available on each site.

#### 4.3.1 Dialogue loop

The evidence of a dialogue loop in social media is more expected than on organisational websites. In the study of the dialogue loop on organisational social media pages Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, the principle will observe the capacity for the organisation to pose a question to stimulate dialogue, the responsiveness of the organisation to directly answer a question or comment by another user and to determine the organisations recent activity. The recent activity feature is determined by how update the last post on their page is and is measured by whether the post was made in 24 hours, within 7 days or within a month. Since social media has proliferated how information is shared and reduced the time-space barrier therefore making information accessible at any time, it is important for organisations to frequently post on their social media pages to remain active within the social online environment. The fast pace of the online environment requires organisations to keep up with the pace and also respond to the target public in a timely manner.

From the thirty organisational websites, only six organisations had direct links to Facebook. The six organisations are Genesis Energy, Telecom, Vodafone NZ, Air New Zealand, The Warehouse and Infratil. These organisations derive from a range of sectors including communication and media, transportation, diversified corporates, retail/ wholesale, and the oil/gas/mineral/electricity/ water sectors. Table 4.2 presents the dialogue loop principle and its features for each of the websites.

**Table 4.2: The dialogue loop on the Facebook pages of New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top thirty organisations		Dialogue loop					
		Poses a question	Direct response to question or comment	Recent activity in 24 hours	Recent activity in a week	Recent activity in a month	Total
17	Genesis Energy		√	√			2
3	Telecom	√	√		√		3
16	Infratil		√	√			2
19	The Warehouse		√	√			2
5	Air NZ		√		√		2
20	Vodafone NZ	√	√		√		3

Table 4.2 reveals most organisations made an attempt to post content on their page within a week. Organisations made an effort to post regular content online and this shows organisations are concerned with continually maintaining the engagement of their stakeholders and wider publics. The recent activity of the organisation helps position the organisation in the minds of their stakeholders and wider environments as updated information or content is usually shown on the newsfeed of peoples Facebook homepages. Though people are able to restrict what comes through their newsfeed and the biggest challenge for organisations on Facebook or the other selected social media pages in this research study is to encourage people to join and participate on social media pages. Despite the effort for organisations made to respond to questions or comments made by people online, only Telecom and Vodafone attempted to pose a question on their Facebook page to stimulate dialogue. Figure 4.1 is an example of Telecom trying to find out what applications are mostly used for smartphone users.

**Figure 4.2: Telecom Smartphone users**



Figure 4.2 shows Telecom is able to gain responses to their question and therefore initiating two-way communication between the organisation and target public. The organisation is also able to generate a number of likes and receive responses to the question posed. Since there are responses to the question, it can be said the dialogic loop is closed. The responses however only acknowledged or answered the question. In this instance, the type of question Telecom posed shows the intent to sustain two-way communication but to garner quick responses. By posing such a question, Telecom is restricting the types of responses it can receive, for example, applications on smartphones. Figure 4.2 shows organisations are attempting to engage people but not trying to really foster dialogue with them. In the comments for the post, Telecom is not seen as responding to any of the comments. The post draws people's attention however only emphasises that organisations are concerned about talking to target public rather than talking with them. Even though this is only one of the many posts Telecom has on their Facebook page, the organisation as participating in the online environment as they are shown as talking to and listening to what people are saying or responding to. Unlike Telecom, The Warehouse posed a rhetorical question not to draw attention to the content about credit card security shown in Figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3: The Warehouse wants you to take part in a survey**



The Warehouse's post only draws a number of likes but no one commented on the post. As no comments are received, the post does not fulfil the dialogue loop but reflects one way communication as the post publicises a survey that is being conducted and calls people to action by providing a link to take part in the survey. Here, The Warehouse is publicising content to serve a purpose that is to get people's input on how they feel about credit card security. It could be the organisations intent is to help Massey get many respondents and also understand the biggest concerns about credit card security to improve the security measures for their online store. Nonetheless, the post shows The Warehouse may have some part in the survey or take away some information from the survey, based on the Facebook post. Apart from organisations attempting pose questions to stimulate dialogue, the dialogue loop principle also takes into account the responsiveness of the organisation to comments or queries. Out of the six organisations that had a Facebook page, Air New Zealand was the only organisation to make a clear statement on reserving the right to delete certain comments. For organisations to manage online content on Facebook, Twitter or Youtube, a representative is hired to act on behalf of the organisation. Figure 4.4 shows Vodafone's response to a particular problem.

**Figure 4.4: Vodafone responds to server issue on Facebook**

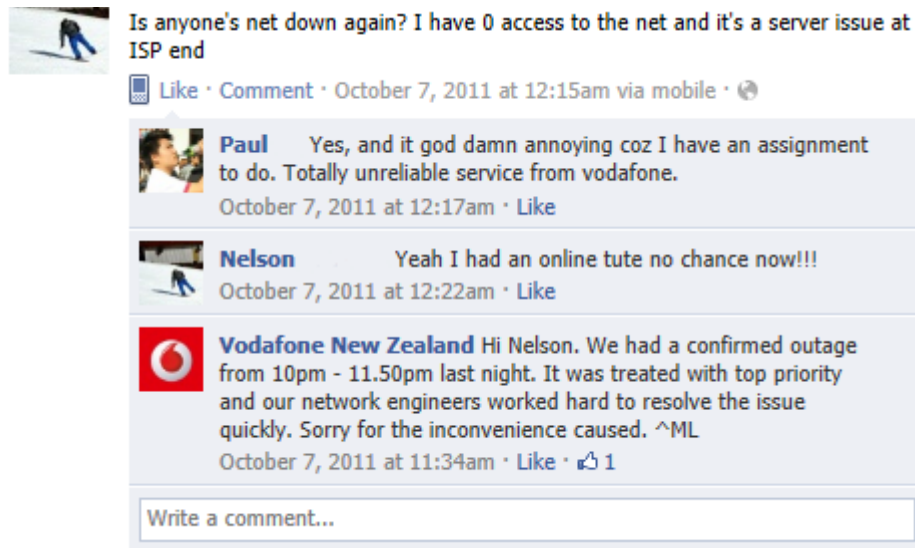


Figure 4.4 reveals the Vodafone representative uses certain communication techniques to respond to people. Vodafone uses professional response by addressing the person by name, highlights when the problem occurred, states how the organisation is treating the problem and apologises for the inconvenience. Although organisations are required to behave in a professional manner when communicating with stakeholders and wider publics, Beal and Strauss (2008) suggested personable and informal tones are more favoured in the online environment and is likely to garner more respect. However, in Figure 4.4 the Vodafone representative tends to use a formal tone in the response. This may be due to the representative acting on behalf of the organisation and has to display a high regard for the organisation and its stakeholders and wider publics, also the representative is bound by organisational codes of conduct. Also, the representative (^ML) uses the second person writing style as they situate themselves within the content or as part of the organisation. According to Beal and Strauss (2008) highlighted in chapter two, the second person writing style is seen as more interactive than first person or third person. However, Vodafone does not show who (^ML) is or what the initials stand for so in this case ^ML is not identifiable to the person they are interacting with and detracts away from a more personable approach to communication. Figure 4.4 also shows that people use social media pages to vent concerns or issues about organisations. When organisations have social media pages such as Facebook it can be a way to isolate problems and is a convenient way for the organisation to extend its customer service online to assist with queries on products and services.

Apart from Facebook, only six organisations used Twitter pages to communicate with the stakeholders and wider publics. The organisations included Vector, Fonterra, Air New Zealand, New Zealand Post, Vodafone and Telecom. Table 4.3 shows the dialogue loop on the Twitter pages of New Zealand Management organisations

**Table 4.3: The dialogue loop on the Twitter pages of New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Dialogue loop					
		Poses a question	Direct response to question or comment	Recent activity in 24 hours	Recent activity in a week	Recent activity in a month	Total
27	Vector		√	√			2
1	Fonterra				√		1
26	NZ Post		√		√		2
5	Air NZ	√	√	√			3
20	Vodafone NZ		√		√		2
3	Telecom	√	√	√			3

Similar to Facebook, the organisation with Twitter pages posted content within seven days. Vector tended to use their Twitter page to disseminate information about their power service outages or faults. The content reflected a public service announcement rather than to engage their stakeholders and wider publics. The page was not used to respond to people because Vector made known that its Twitter account is not monitored 24/7 and suggests people call a number to report a fault. That particular statement shows the intents for the organisation is to inform rather to engage in two-way communication. In some instances when a person made a comment or tagged Vector in a post, Vector would be responsive.

From the findings, the presence of the organisations stimulating dialogue on Twitter pages is not common. Most organisations utilised their page as a platform as an extension of customer service and to engage their followers around their business. Although Telecom and Air New Zealand attempted to pose questions to stimulate

dialogue, like Facebook, more organisations tended to respond to comments and queries on their page instead. Vodafone NZ tries to keep people talking by posting regularly and asking questions when replying to a query or comment made by a person. Figure 4.5 shows the Vodafone dialogue loop on Vodafone’s Twitter page. It is an example of how Vodafone probes the person for more answers to fix a problem. That way the Vodafone representative responds shows the willingness to find a solution for the person.

**Figure 4.5: The dialogue loop on Vodafone’s Twitter page**



Amongst the three types of social media pages selected for this research study, the dialogue loop was not evident on Youtube. There no presence of the organisation posing a question to stimulate dialogue and the organisation responding to a comment or query a person had made. Telecom, Air New Zealand, NZ Post and Vodafone are the only four out thirty organisations that utilised Youtube to communicate with their target publics. Since none of the organisations used the dialogue loop, it is the result of Youtube being mostly utilised as a video sharing platform to share and promote videos such as advertisements and skits to tell a story about the organisation and its operations. Air New Zealand and Vodafone were the only two organisations to have uploaded a video within 7 days of the last post while Telecom and New Zealand Post had uploaded a video within a month. The findings highlight organisations tended to

post more consistently on their other social media pages Facebook and Twitter rather than Youtube.

#### **4.3.2 Conservation of visitors**

Conservation of visitors is the next dialogic principle of communication used in this research study to examine the dialogic principles of communication on selected social media pages Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The conservation of visitors is the extent organisations use features to keep stakeholders and wider publics on their page. Videos, photos and downloadable information are ways the organisation can keep people on their page. It was observed during the first week of October 2011 that there was no downloadable information about the organisation apparent on Facebook, Twitter or Youtube pages at the time of this research study. On Facebook, the six organisations that had Facebook pages - Genesis Energy, Telecom, Infratil, The Warehouse, Air New Zealand and Vodafone used photos to engage their stakeholders and wider publics. Telecom provided photos on product launches and sponsored events; Vodafone included photos on the launch of Iphone 4s, the warriors and music awards while Genesis Energy showed photos of their volunteers in Christchurch. The range of photos on Facebook tell their stakeholders and wider publics about what their organisation is about, the activities they do, the product they sell and the types of services they provide. Photos are a way for organisations to communicate their identity and share their organisational life with others in the online environment. Even though all organisations had used photos on Facebook, it was observed that videos were also. Like photos, videos came in the form of trailers, skits and advertisement, for example Vodafone displayed their "Double-back" promotional advertising campaign. At the time of the research study, Telecom and Genesis Energy did not have any videos apparent on their page. Figure 4.6 shows an example of a video The Warehouse posted in support of the New Zealand rugby team the All Blacks during the rugby world cup 2011.

**Figure 4.6: The Warehouse staff back Black**



The video post engaged a lot of people as 105 people liked the video and 32 comments were made at the time this research was conducted. During the rugby world cup in New Zealand, many New Zealand organisations showed support for their national team online. By posting the video on their page, other people are able to share the video with their own personal networks. The video shows part of the organisations identity through the organisations brand colours that is integrated in the staff clothing, and the store.

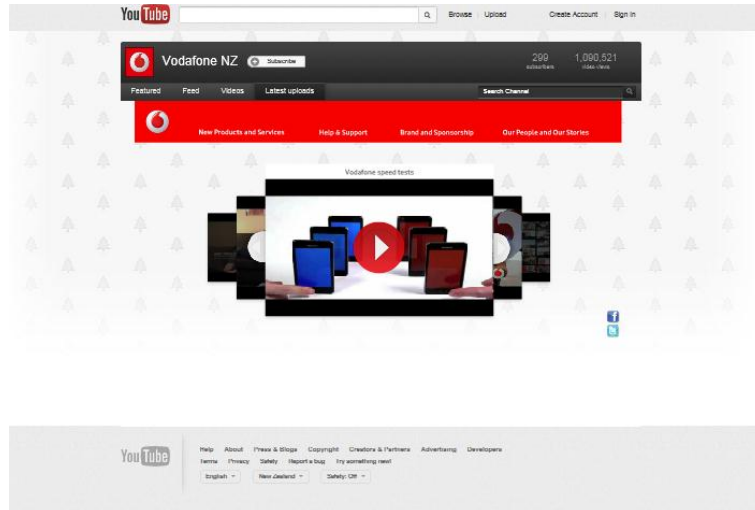
On Twitter, photos were a common way to conserve visitors on a page. In fact out of the six organisations, Fonterra, Air New Zealand, Vodafone and Telecom used photos on their Twitter pages while Vector and New Zealand Post had no evidence of photos within the last thirty days this research was conducted. The photos on Twitter were similar to that found on Facebook and the same can be said about the videos apparent on the wall of Telecom, Air New Zealand and Fonterra Twitter pages. Unlike Twitter and Facebook, since Youtube is a video sharing platform Vodafone, New Zealand Post, Telecom and Air New Zealand showed videos. The Youtube channel was mainly used to upload videos about the organisations products and services, display organisation culture, and advertisements. Air New Zealand channel promotes their advertisements, safety videos and show chronicles of the sheep Mason & Jason, and also Rico. The different types of stories keeps the Air New Zealand channel going. Vodafone's Youtube channel is well designed. It offers clear tabs and headings showing the different sections of the page. The videos range from new products and services, help and support, to brand and sponsorship, people and vodafone stories. Air New Zealand

is rank number five in the ranking of top thirty organisations for this study and is also the most active organisation among the three social media. Youtube had lesser features than Facebook and Twitter for each organisation. The low number reflects the broadcast nature of Youtube which is less interactive than Twitter and Facebook. Figure 4.7 and figure 4.8 show how Air New Zealand and Vodafone personalise their Youtube channel to differentiate themselves from other organisations and also engage their target public through the use of colour and design to appeal to the eye.

**Figure 4.7: Air New Zealand's Youtube channel**



**Figure 4.8: Vodafone New Zealand's Youtube channel**



From figure 4.7 and figure 4.8, Vodafone and Air New Zealand personalise their pages through colour and design aesthetics. Air New Zealand personalised their page to include an interactive map of their international airports destinations, flight paths and flight details. The map on their Youtube channel allows people to zoom in for more information about international travel. Overall, Youtube had less dialogic principles of communication due to Youtube normally used to upload videos rather than utilised for two-way communication and fostering dialogue. A strategically designed channel can lead to people returning to the page.

#### **4.3.3 Generation of return visits**

According to Kent and Taylor (1998) the generation of return visits is the extent people are given incentives to return to the website over time. To keep people returning to the organisational page on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, the research observed whether the organisation had a wall this showed the organisation welcomed two-way communication to occur. Other features that were observed in the generation of return visits included capacity for a person to join the page (subscribe, like or follow), promotional material to attract stakeholders and wider publics about competitions or deals, customer service and a list of calendar of events. The generation of return visits is an important principle in Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework as the capacity for the organisation to provide reasons as to why people should return to an organisational website can help build organisation-stakeholder relationships by using the channels or



features as ways to communicate with stakeholders and wider publics. Table 4.4 presents the features New Zealand Management organisations used to generate return visits on their Facebook pages.

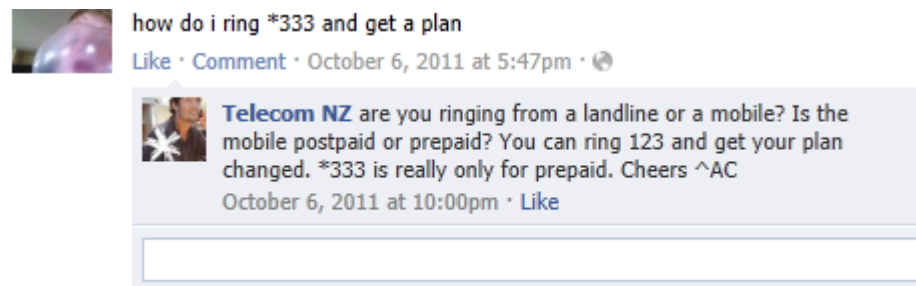
**Table 4.4: The generation of return visits on the selected Facebook pages of New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Generation of return visits					
		Wall	Join page (subscribe, follow, like)	Promotional material	Customer service	Calendar of events	Total
17	Genesis Energy	√	√				2
3	Telecom	√	√	√	√		4
16	Infratil	√	√	√			3
19	The Warehouse	√	√	√	√		4
5	Air NZ	√	√	√			3
20	Vodafone NZ	√	√	√	√		4

Table 4.4 shows conventional features on Facebook like a wall and the capacity to join the page is apparent on all organisational Facebook pages. From the findings, promotional material is the most common way for organisations to attract stakeholders and wider publics onto their page. The promotion includes competitions, deals or simply promotion of organisational products and services. Not everyone is attracted to the same deals or competitions but when a promotion of a certain product or service is displayed people will be intrigued to read what the promotion is about and from there determine whether the promotion is for them. Also quite common on the selected Facebook pages of New Zealand Management organisations is when their page also acted as a customer service tool to answer questions or problems people may have about the organisations products and services. Whether it is the organisations intention or purpose to use Facebook for customer service is unknown as it is not explicitly shown on the page (although Vodafone did have a section particularly for customer service). However, since organisations have a wall on which anybody can post information on, it gives people some type of control as to what they want to ask the organisation. So in this case, organisations are forced to respond to the queries made to them in order to be seen as participating in the social

media environment and therefore, displaying acts of two-way communication. Figure 4.9 is an example of a post that highlights how Facebook page is seen as a customer service tool.

**Figure 4.9: Facebook as a customer service tool**



From the findings in this chapter so far, it seems organisations have created ways for organisation-stakeholder relationships to occur through two-way communication and organisations have used social media as a way to maintain their online reputation. However, in terms of fostering dialogue with stakeholders and wider publics, using the Facebook wall as a customer service tool or a way to promote organisational products or services is not a way to sustain dialogue. Facebook can be a space where potentially organisations can foster dialogue but from the findings on how organisations are using their pages suggests dialogue is not occurring.

On selected organisational Facebook pages, it is surprising that none of them listed upcoming events. When an event is listed the administrator can allow people to invite their own personal networks to the event. The listings of events would have been a good opportunity to raise awareness of the organisation and potentially increase the number of people who have joined their page, hence building the organisations external community. Also a way for organisations and people to see how active the organisation is or how popular their page is, is through observing the “talking about this” feature placed on a side bar for people to see how many people are talking about the organisation. Figure 4.10 is an example of what the feature looks like on Facebook.

**Figure 4.10: Facebook “talking about this” feature**



The “talking about this” feature helps organisations track the conversation happening around specific pages. According to WebMediaBrands (2012) the feature includes an aggregation of the people that like the organisations page, post on the page’s wall, sharing, liking or commenting on posts such as photos, videos or albums on the organisations page and basically takes into account a persons activity around the organisations page. For businesses, the feature is vital in understanding what types of people are liking and interacting with an organisation. The feature also allows organisations to gain demographic data such as gender and age, countries, cities and language information based on a persons interaction with the organisations page (Facebook, 2012). From a marketing point of view organisations, are able to target their publics precisely and tailor the content on their pages to suit them. The organisation can use this information to see how active and engaging their organisational page is. The ‘like’ feature on Facebook pages lets the visitor become a fan by clicking the ‘like’ button. Table 4.5 reveals the numbers of people who ‘like’ the organisational page and the number of people who are talking about the organisation. The “talking about feature” on Facebook helps organisations understand whether they are being talked about through tags, links, comments and likes on posts made by stakeholders and wider publics. The feature demonstrates the level of engagement of the organisational page.

**Table 4.5: Facebook 'Likes' and 'How many people are talking about the organisation'**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of likes</b>	<b>How many people are talking about the organisation</b>
Genesis Power	200	1
Infratil	7, 377	15
The Warehouse Group	32, 370	412
Telecom	27,912	520
Vodafone	40, 720	883
Air NZ	150, 583	6,500

Air New Zealand had the most number of people liking the organisation and Genesis Energy had the least. Air New Zealand had 150, 583 likes and the highest number of people talking about the organisation (6500 people). The type of feature allows organisations to monitor the level of engagement of their Facebook community, attempt to trigger responses that make stakeholders comment on a post than just 'liking' it.

Air NZ was the most talked about amongst the 6 organisations. The average number of likes is 43, 194 and the average number of people talking about an organisation is 1,389. Genesis Energy had the least number of likes and just one person talking about the organisation. The low number of people talking about Genesis Energy Facebook page is attributed to the page being designed for a campaign which is no longer active and the page seems abandoned. The Facebook icon for Genesis Energy was hidden as it was not found on the first page of the organisational website. By placing the icon somewhere else other than the first place suggests the page was not designed for the organisation as a whole but designed for a temporary campaign named "Neighbourhood Muck-in ". The campaign was a volunteering program for Christchurch. The page was used to inform others about the activities volunteers were doing in Christchurch.

On Twitter pages it was observed that the generation of return visits is used more than any other dialogic principle of communication. Like Facebook, all six Twitter organisations provided a wall for organisations and used Twitter to promote organisational products, services and activities while at the time most organisations except Fonterra utilised their Twitter page to provide customer service to their stakeholders and wider publics. Though Facebook had the opportunity to list calendar of events on Twitter the interface and design of Twitter does not include a calendar of events. Table 4.6 summarises the findings of the generation of return visits on Twitter.

**Table 4.6: The generation of return visits on selected Twitter pages of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top thirty organisations		Generation of return visits					
		Wall	Join page (subscribe, follow, like)	Promotional material	Customer service	Calendar of events	Total
27	Vector	√	√		√		3
1	Fonterra	√	√	√			3
26	NZ Post	√	√	√	√		4
5	Air NZ	√	√	√	√		4
20	Vodafone NZ	√	√	√	√		4
3	Telecom	√	√	√	√		4

The number of tweets, number of people/organisations the organisation follows and the number of people that follow the organisation was recorded. A tweet is similar to a post of a message, photo, or video. The table below is ranked according to the number of tweets the organisation has made during the first week of October.

**Table 4.7: The Tweets, organisational followers and people that follow the organisation**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of Tweets</b>	<b>Number of people the organisation follows</b>	<b>Number of people that follow the organisation</b>
Fonterra	206	209	1,057
NZ Post	352	2, 210	2, 149
Vector	409	193	583
Air NZ	10, 027	23, 318	33, 012
Telecom	11, 929	9,522	13, 046
Vodafone	27, 501	2, 514	16, 425

As the table presents, there is no correlation between the number of tweets and the number of people that follow the organisation. Although Air New Zealand had the most number of people following the organisation at the time the studied was conducted Air New Zealand had less tweets than Vodafone who tweeted the most out of the six organisations. On the other hand, New Zealand Post had more followers than Vector and Fonterra. In the figures presented in the table, Air New Zealand seemed to extend its presence within the Twitter sphere by following other organisations or people. By Air New Zealand following other organisations it shows Air New Zealand supports or has some interest in the people or other organisations that they do business with. If the organisations with Twitter accounts chose to follow other people it may increase the number of people following the organisation. The average number of tweets is 8, 370, average number of followers is 11, 045 and the average number of the organisation following others is 6, 328.

Unlike Facebook and Twitter, some Youtube pages had no wall for the users to leave comments on their channel. As shown in previous discussion of the dialogic principles of communication on social media pages, Youtube is a video sharing utility and the organisational channels selected for data collection show none of the organisations had a dialogue loop. Vodafone, New Zealand Post, Telecom and Air New Zealand did

not attempt to stimulate dialogue or respond to a question or comment made on the channel. However, Telecom and Air New Zealand did provide a wall for people to write down their comments. By enabling people to post comments on their Youtube channel, the organisation can gain some feedback in terms of what people think about their videos. Table 4.8 presents the findings of the four New Zealand Management organisations that had Youtube on their organisational homepage.

**Table 4.8: The generation of return visits for Youtube channels of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Generation of return visits					
		Wall	Join page (subscribe, follow, like)	Promotional material	Customer service	Calendar of events	Total
20	Vodafone NZ		√	√			2
26	NZ Post		√	√			2
3	Telecom	√	√	√			3
5	Air NZ	√	√	√			3

The number of Youtube subscribers, channel views and total upload views were recorded on for the four organisational Youtube pages. Subscribers are the people who want to join the page and be updated of any new video uploads, channel views are the total number of people that view the Youtube channel and reflects the traffic of how many people visit the organisational Youtube page. The total upload views indicates the summation of how many people have watched videos online.

**Table 4.9: Youtube subscribers, channel views and total upload views**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Subscribers</b>	<b>Channel views</b>	<b>Total upload views</b>
NZ Post	16	2409	11,996
Telecom	200	39,815	230,284
Vodafone	262	26,222	1,046,997
Air NZ	4841	1,067,532	8,502,181

Air New Zealand had the highest numbers in all three areas. It had the most number of subscribers while New Zealand Post had the least number of subscribers. Air New Zealand also had the most channel views amongst the other three organisations whereas New Zealand Post had the least and Air New Zealand had the highest upload views than all three organisations. Air New Zealand high numbers can be attributed to how long their Youtube page has been active. Air New Zealand joined Youtube on May 31, 2006. The organisation has been utilising Youtube longer than the other organisations and have come to grips with how to personalise and cater to their Youtube audience, therefore, building a fan base or number of subscribers over time. As time progressed, Air New Zealand has become accustomed to utilising social media to engage and communicate with stakeholders and wider publics and understand how best to engage their target publics online. It is quite interesting that New Zealand Post established their Youtube channel in the same year as Air New Zealand however the organisation has not been able to receive the same amount of subscribers, channel views or upload views as Air New Zealand. This may be due to lack of engaging content for people and lack of consistency in the maintenance of their Youtube channel. It seems the key to succeed in Youtube is to find something that is innovative and appealing to the target public. As already discussed Air New Zealand found ways to engage people by introducing characters and creating stories about them and organisational products and services. Also, Vodafone joined in July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 and Telecom is fairly new to Youtube and has been active since January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Despite Telecoms late entry into Youtube, it has already gained many channel views than Vodafone and almost the same number of subscribers as Vodafone at the time of this research study. The findings reveal that content is a crucial number in triggering



responses or views and organisations need to focus on whether they can sustain the level of innovation and appeal on their Youtube channel.

#### **4.3.4 Usefulness of information**

The usefulness of information is the extent information appeals to stakeholders and wider publics. In the hopes to fulfil their information needs and information seeking habits, the following features were observed on the selected social media pages of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations. Table 4.10 presents the findings of the usefulness of information on the Facebook pages of Genesis Energy, Telecom, Infratil, The Warehouse, Air New Zealand and Vodafone. The most common features included direct links to the organisations official website and displaying organisational 'likes' on the page. The common features do not reveal much but does suggest organisations find that it is important to draw people to their official website. It shows social media pages like Facebook do not function on its own but functions as an extension of their main organisational website. These social media pages are only extensions of a website because organisations are bound by the interface and design structure of Facebook, Twitter or Youtube and can only work within those boundaries. However, with an organisational website, organisations have the capacity to include as much information they feel would meet the information needs and information seeking habits of stakeholders and wider publics. Though it is important for social media pages to include some information about the organisation the findings in the research study showed links to other social media pages (if available), employment information, map of location, photos and names of administration staff and who the organisation sponsors are less common.

**Table 4.10: The usefulness of information on the selected Facebook pages of top thirty New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Useful information										
		Link to official website	Link to other social media	Organisation following/ like	Overview of organisation	Logo	Employment information	Map of location	Photos of team admin	Names of team admin	Sponsors	Total
17	Genesis Energy	✓		✓	✓							3
3	Telecom	✓		✓		✓						3
16	Infratil	✓		✓	✓	✓						4
19	The Warehouse	✓		✓	✓		✓					4
5	Air NZ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	6
20	Vodafone NZ	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				6

Vodafone made an effort to integrate information and other web pages. Vodafone displayed a 'quick links' tab for Vodafone's other important sites such as Twitter, online shop, forum, and Vodafone play. They integrated these links into the Facebook page so people can know about other Vodafone social media features that are available and used for communication. On Twitter, the usefulness of information is less used as are not able to put a lot of information on their Twitter page except for links to the official organisation site and logo. None of the organisations had an overview of the organisation, employment information, map of location and a list of organisations they sponsored. Table 4.11 highlights the usefulness of information on the selected Twitter pages of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations.

**Table 4.11: The usefulness of information on the selected Twitter pages of top thirty New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Useful information										
		Link to official website	Link to other social media	Organisation following/ like	Overview of organisation	Logo	Employment information	Map of location	Photos of ream admin	Names of team admin	Sponsors	Total
27	Vector	✓		✓		✓						3
1	Fonterra	✓		✓		✓						3
26	NZ Post	✓		✓		✓					✓	4
5	Air NZ	✓		✓		✓						3
20	Vodafone NZ	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓	5
3	Telecom	✓		✓		✓				✓	✓	5

All of the organisations displayed the number of followers the organisation had and presented their logo as the display picture on their page. Telecom was the only organisation that had photos of their administration staff while 3 of the 6 organisations (Telecom, Vodafone NZ and NZ Post) included the names of the administration staff for Twitter on their pages. This was normally seen on the left of the screen. Figure 4.11 shows Telecom's Twitter page and the names and photos of administration team.

**Figure 4.11: Telecoms Twitter page**



Although many organisational social media pages did not disclose an identity such as a name or present a picture of administration staff on their page to show the person who they are communicating with. Twitter is the only social space where names and photos of administration staff were present and placed personal touch to the organisations communication online. When organisations identify the staff administrators on their social page it makes the person feel less detached from the communication exchange and the organisation. By adding a human face to the interaction on social media pages makes the administrators more accountable for their actions and a greater effort is placed on responding to appropriately to target publics, therefore, holding administrators accountable for comments, videos and photos that are posted.

Similar to the other social media pages, organisations contained the features to subscribe to the channel, links to their official website and links to other social media pages. Only half of the organisations (Telecom and New Zealand Post) included an overview of their organisation on their channel. Youtube did not contain much useful information about organisations. Most of the information such as presence of sponsors, photos and names of administration staffs, and employment information is less common. The lack of utilisation of these elements may be due to type of social space. Facebook allows for more information about the organisation to be displayed including opportunities for the organisation to engage in two-way communication in both Facebook and to a limited extent on Twitter as characters on Twitter are restricted to 140. Whereas on Youtube there is not much space to communicate much information about the organisation except through videos and descriptions about these videos to others. Table 4.12 shows the usefulness of information on the selected Youtube pages of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations.

**Table 4.12: The usefulness of information on the selected Youtube pages of the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations**

New Zealand Management magazine top 30 organisations		Useful information									
		Link to official website	Link to other social media	Organisation following/ like	Overview of organisation	Logo	Employment information	Map of location	Photos of ream admin	Names of team admin	Sponsors
20	Vodafone NZ		✓			✓					2
26	NZ Post	✓			✓	✓					3
3	Telecom	✓			✓	✓					3
5	Air NZ	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			5

Air New Zealand and Vodafone are the only organisations that directed the user to other social media pages such as Twitter and Facebook. The link for these social media pages indicates the organisations integration of information across some online spaces such as the main organisational website and other social spaces. When the organisation displays a link on these pages it shows the organisation is ensuring that all elements of the communication are linked. It is important for different social pages to be linked so people do not get the wrong information.

#### **4.4 Dialogic principles of communication on the websites of the New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations**

Like the dialogic features of communication in social media pages, the dialogic features were adapted to suit the online environment. The dialogic features of communication fall under the principles of dialogic communication ease of interface, dialogic loop, and the usefulness information, generation of return visits and conservation of visits. Each principle was marked according to the feature's presence on the website. Below is a table for the dialogic principles of communication for New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations for 2010.

#### 4.13 The dialogic principles of communication on New Zealand Management's top thirty organisations for 2010

		Dialogic principles of communication																									Total	
		Ease of interface					Generation of return visits					Conservation of visitors			Usefulness of information										Dialogue loop			
New Zealand Management top 30 organisations 2010		Browser	Site guide	Popular topics	Search engine	Change language/location	Subscribe	Promo material	List of events	Login/ register	Newsfeed link	Info updated	Video	Audio	Downloadable info	Overview of org	Employment info	Privacy Policy	Products & services	Investor info	Terms of use	Help or FAQ	Contact us/ Feedback form	Media centre	Sponsorship/ community	Org stimulates dialogue	Org is responsive to questions	
1	Fonterra Co-operative Group (Auckland)		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			18
2	Fletcher Building (Auckland)		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			19
3	Telecom Corporation of New Zealand (Wellington)			✓	✓		✓			✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			16
4	Woolworths New Zealand Group (Auckland)			✓			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			14
5	Air New Zealand			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			20
6	Foodstuffs (Auckland)		✓				✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			13
7	Shell New Zealand Holding Company (Wellington)		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			16
8	BP New Zealand Holdings (Wellington)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			17
9	Foodstuffs South Island (Christchurch)		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			14
10	Foodstuffs (Wellington) Co-operative Lower Hutt																										0	
11	Contact Energy Wellington		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			20
12	Fulton Hogan Christchurch					✓							✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓			9
13	Chevron New Zealand (Auckland)		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			18
14	Silver Fern Farms (Dunedin)			✓	✓			✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				14
15	Meridian Energy (Wellington)			✓	✓					✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			16
16	Infratil (Wellington)		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			15
17	Genesis Power (Auckland)		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			18
18	ExxonMobil New Zealand Holdings (Auckland)		✓	✓	✓	✓									✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			15
19	The Warehouse Group		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			19
20	Vodafone New Zealand		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			19
21	ZESPRI Group		✓		✓	✓		✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			16
22	Mighty River Power		✓		✓		✓				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			14
23	Alliance Group				✓				✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓				11
24	Nuplex Industries				✓				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓				12
25	Ebos Group								✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓				6
26	New Zealand Post		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			20
27	Vector				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			19
28	ANZCO Foods		✓	✓	✓										✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓			10
29	Goodman Fielder New Zealand		✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			17
30	PGG Wrightson						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			16
	Total	0	18	15	24	7	12	14	14	17	15	21	11	3	29	29	26	22	29	23	21	21	29	27	24	0	0	

Foodstuffs Cooperative (Wellington) was the only organisation listed in New Zealand Management's top thirty 2010 that did not have a website of its own, however the organisation provided an email link from the Foodstuffs (Auckland) website. The thirty websites consisted of common features such as search engine box, downloadable information, updated information (within thirty days). Each of these features helps the stakeholder navigate, access, learn and contact the organisation. Apart from the most common features apparent on the studied organisational websites, less common features included videos, audio and the indication the organisation is stimulating dialogue by posing a question or directly answering a comment or query made by a stakeholder or publics.

#### **4.4.1 Dialogue loop**

The dialogic loop shows the extent organisations facilitate dialogue by establishing channels and procedures for dialogic communication to take place. The dialogic loop in this study symbolises the responsiveness of the organisation by observing attempts of the organisation to stimulate dialogue and respond to a question or comment by a user. The appearance of email, feedback forms, help or FAQ and also platforms or channels that can be used to foster dialogue such as blogs and social networks is excluded. Once the organisation is seen as responding to a query or comment, the loop is then closed. On all websites in this research study none of them encouraged dialogue on their page as no question are asked to prompt two-way communication and organisations did not respond to a comment or query. This indicates organisational websites may not intend to engage in two-way communication on their websites but rather use their websites as a way to strengthen their identity with their wider environment.

#### **4.4.2 Usefulness of information**

The usefulness of information principle is most apparent on the thirty websites studied. From the data obtained from the organisational websites, four main stakeholders were identified. The websites provided content to fulfil the information needs of investors/shareholders, staff and potential employees, the media and

customers. Some of the content for these stakeholders included annual reports and financial information, media releases, job vacancy listings and product and service details. In fact, many of the organisational websites included sections on employment, sponsorship and community, an overview of the organisation, media centre and a place for people to contact the organisation or provide feedback. It is not surprising organisational websites consist of these sections as the information in organisation overview and media centre for example can offer opportunities for the organisation to display and promote their identity through mission statements, core values, news releases and content concerning the organisations products and services. Table 4.14 presents the total number of features for the usefulness of information on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010.

**Table 4.14: Total number of features for the usefulness of information on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010**

Principle	Item	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Usefulness of information	Overview of organisation	29	97
	Employment information	26	87
	Privacy policy	22	73
	Products & services	29	97
	Investor information	23	77
	Legal or terms of use	21	70
	Help or FAQ	21	70
	Contact us or Feedback form	29	97
	Newsroom or media centre	27	90
	Sponsorship & community	24	80



As organisations use websites to publicise what their organisation is about, whom the organisation associates with and what the organisation is doing within its community, websites usually display information that does not require interaction or two-way communication between the organisation, its stakeholders and wider publics. The websites are used as a way for the organisation to communicate its services, products and history to the stakeholders and wider publics. The majority of websites offered opportunities for users to apply for jobs within the organisation however, Ebos, Infratil and Chevron New Zealand (Caltex) did not include employment information on their websites. Other organisations such as Woolworths Group, The Warehouse, NZ Post and Alliance Group preferred to display their jobs on an entirely different website. Apart from just the list of job vacancies, these individual websites offered interview tips and links to social media channels such as Youtube and LinkedIn as seen on the New Zealand Post job site. Although the separation of the job site from the main organisational website is interesting, the capacity for the people to engage in a discussion is unavailable.

As the table 4.14 shows, most websites contained a privacy policy, some hidden in the terms and conditions and other clearly visible on the homepage. Nowadays there is an increased discussion on privacy settings and policies on websites and also social media pages. Foodstuffs, Foodstuffs South Island and Alliance Group did not appear to have a privacy policy and it is interesting as these websites required people to disclose information to the organisation by registering with the organisation. Legal terms and the help or FAQ feature are common and conventional features on organisational websites, with most organisations opting to use a feedback form instead of providing a direct email address to a specific person to contact. Also popular was the listing of physical addresses and contact numbers on organisational websites. The absence of direct email addresses can be due to restricting the amount of email an organisations staff member receives on a daily basis.

#### 4.4.3 Generation of return visits

Generation of return visits shows the extent visitors are given incentives to return to the website over time. Organisations can use different features on their website to generate return visits from their stakeholders and wider publics. For this research, the ability for a user to subscribe to content, presence of promotional material, calendar of events, a membership to the organisation, newsfeed link and updated information was used to determine the extent organisations use these features to encourage users to return to their website. Table 4.15 presents the total number of features for the generation of return visits on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010.

**Table 4.15: Total number of features for the generation of return visits on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010**

Principle	Item	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
<b>Generation of return visits</b>	Ability to subscribe	12	40
	Promotional material	14	47
	Calendar of events	14	47
	Login/registration	17	57
	Newsfeed link	15	50
	Information updated within 30 days	21	70

In 40% of organisational websites contained a subscription to newsletters or e-alerts for information updates, while almost a half of the thirty organisational websites provided promotional material on their homepage. Websites tended to display promotional material such as competitions, media releases, advertisements, events, new products and services, news links and stories. These types of promotional material may attract the people to click on the subject but the promotion does not interact with the user through two way communication. The promotional material on websites is seen as a way to engage the user in the content rather than communicate with them. In relation to maintaining organisational reputation, websites generate repeat visits by creating engaging content that would appeal to the target public and the website is

used as a platform to showcase what the organisation is about and what it has to offer. For example, competitions and promotion of new products and services is one way communication. Also the listing of events in almost half of the organisations reflects the notion of one way communication by informing the target public about upcoming events. Most of the websites that listed events however, were meeting dates for shareholders. The events for customers or other stakeholders were not apparent. Another attempt for organisations to generate repeated visits to their website is to encourage people to become members. The motive as to what makes people become members of a particular website was not investigated in this research but the appearance of the logins/register feature encourages and invites users to become part of the organisations community. As part of the organisation community the person may benefit from inclusive information such as discounts on products or services. A benefit someone who is not part of the community is likely to get. Though the intentions of why an organisation wants someone to register to an organisation is questionable as information about the person concerning name, residential address, phone number can be a way for the organisation to keep tabs on how the user browses the website or online habits. It was observed that organisations made an effort to update the information on their website within the last thirty days. This signifies organisations placed an importance in maintaining their organisational website and indeed wanted users to not only return to the website for information but to be seen as taking care of their online identity.

#### **4.4.4 Ease of interface**

The ease of interface principle relates to the effortlessness for users to navigate and locate information on a website. In the study, five features were used to locate the ease for a person to find information on the organisation website. The five features are browser capability, site guide, and section for popular topics, search engine box and an option to change language/location on a website. The importance of this principle is that people want to be able to find information they want without too much trouble. However, the ease of interface is dependent on how the user can easily find information and also navigate their way through the entire website. This principle is reliant upon the user's ability and knowledge to utilise the functions on an

organisational website. Below the table shows the total number of features for the ease of interface on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010.

**Table 4.16: Total number of features for the ease of interface on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010**

Principle	Item	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
<b>Ease of interface</b>	Browser capability	0	0
	Site guide/map/directory	18	60
	Section for popular topics/searches	15	50
	Search engine box	24	80
	Option to change language/location	7	23

None of the websites offered the visitor the capacity to change the website setting to either run on a graphic and multimedia site or basic text. For example, selecting a basic text browser will download website content much faster as it leaves out graphics and multimedia material that usually takes longer to upload. Also, some of the multinational organisations such as BP, Air New Zealand, Shell, Fulton Hogan, Chevron New Zealand (Caltex), Exxon Mobil New Zealand and Zespri Group provided an option to change the location of the website. The organisations have global websites meaning they provide information for their operations in different countries. Air New Zealand, BP, Exxon Mobil New Zealand and Zespri Group offer the visitor from a different country, for example France, Korea, Italy to view and read information in their native language such as French, Italian or Korean. By multinational organisations tailoring their websites for local culture shows the organisations takes into account the way information is presented to different countries. The extent to which the information is tailored for the particular country is interesting and whether the translation just regurgitates information from the host website or personalises the information for the people of that particular region. None of the websites offered an option for the information to be viewed in Maori.

For this research the sitemaps were useful in determining the levels of information, e.g. the headings and subheadings of information the organisation had on their website. Some websites opted to list the different sections on the website and subheadings at the bottom of the page instead of a sitemap. Instead of the listings of topics, rollover headings were a common feature on half of the organisational websites. Rollover headings allowed the user to look at the subheadings for each section before clicking therefore reducing the time it takes for a user to locate information. To highlight popular topics or searches on the websites, Chevron New Zealand (Caltex) and Shell integrated tag clouds on their websites. Tag clouds are an arrangement of small to large sized keyword/s of popular topics. The tag clouds are a creative way to draw attention to key topics on the website and make navigation of particular topics easier. Like sitemaps, the presence of a search engine box is also common amongst the thirty organisational websites studied in this research. The search engine box was positioned at eye level in the top right corner of the webpage making it easier for the visitor to locate it. However, the search engine box feature was also located in other places on the screen such as bottom-left (Fonterra), bottom-right (Zespri Group) or on the left side of the page, evident on Nuplex Industries website. Other locations of the particular feature are less common and perhaps unconventional as the majority of the websites positioned the search engine box in the top right. The importance of the ease of interface principle is it contributes to the user finding the information they want however it is not always certain the user will retrieve the information they want for example using a websites search engine will only respond to certain tags or phrases. Also, on the homepage, to locate further information scrolling down the page was required.

#### **4.4.5 Conservation of visitors**

To conserve visitors on an organisational website video, audio and downloadable content was observed. The conservation of visitors principle is the extent organisational websites encouraged users to stay on their website. Very little audio and video content existed on many of the websites. Table 4.17 shows the total number

of features for the conservation of visitors on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010.

**Table 4.17: Total number of features for the conservation of visitors on websites for the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations for 2010**

Principle	Item	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
<b>Conservation of visitors</b>	Video (button, link or self-playing)	11	37
	Audio (button, link or self-playing)	3	10
	Downloadable information	29	97

The videos that did exist included animation observed on the Fonterra website of the “Story of milk” which highlighted the milk process from collecting it from the farm to distribution in the market. A similar animation is also found on Chevron New Zealand (Caltex) where an animation is used to show how engines work. Silver Farms used videos to demonstrate how meat can be cooked using different types of recipes. These examples show an attempt by the person in charge of the website to be creative in displaying information on the website. Based on the findings, videos seemed more popular than audio content as videos are visual materials and appeal more to people than just audio content. Although audio content was found in three organisations the content was related to financial information. Like audio, most downloadable information was financial information such as annual reports and presentations. Though many of the websites that had downloadable information provided download links for news items and media kits. It is important to note the application of videos, audios and downloadable content can only conserve people for a small amount of time. The extent to which people feel encouraged to stay on the website is dependent on whether the content in the audio, video or downloadable material actually appeals to them.

## 4.5 Summary

In this research study the top thirty New Zealand Management organisations in 2010 are used in this study to examine the extent of dialogic principles of communication on both websites and selected social media pages and also the extent social media is adopted on organisational websites. These websites and selected social media pages are platforms the organisation can utilise to manage organisational identity and put in place channels for two-way communication to engage and interact with stakeholders and wider publics. It was observed that photos and videos are common ways for the organisation to conserve people on their websites and social media pages. However, from this chapter, the type of content and how organisations choose to engage stakeholders and wider publics are important aspects in encouraging participation on social media pages, generating return visits on websites and social media pages and two-way communication. Not many of the organisations used two-way communication in an attempt to foster dialogue as the research findings highlight organisations utilise social media pages as a customer service tool and page administrators did not intend to foster in-depth communication. From the findings organisational websites are seen as the main pages for stakeholders and wider publics to fulfil their information needs and information seeking habits while social media pages acted as an extension of the organisational website. When organisations participated in social media pages, the stakeholder and wider public become part of the organisational community where they become subscribers, followers or likers of an organisational page and are constantly kept up to date with organisational activity. Based on the findings, it is fair to say organisations are still trying to grasp whether social media is right for them and whether engaging in social media activities would achieve organisational objectives or contribute to the bottom-line. Organisations are however bound by the resources of they have. These findings present a snapshot of the decisions implemented on websites and selected social media pages and also sheds light on the development of websites in the era of social media technologies.

## **Chapter 5: Evaluation**

### **5.1 Overview**

From a qualitative content analysis of New Zealand Managements top thirty organisational websites and selected social media pages, chapter five presents the major findings in this research study. The study focuses on websites and social media pages as ways for the organisation to engage in two-way communication or facilitate dialogue by establishing channels and procedures for dialogic communication. To investigate whether organisations are integrating social media and utilising websites and social media pages for two-way communication, the findings highlight the extent to which organisations adopt social media and the extent the dialogic principles of communication are evident on both organisational websites and selective social media pages. Chapter five evaluates the findings to address the major findings its implications on the research study, the relationship between the findings and those of other studies and the significance of the findings in terms of theory and practice.

### **5.2 To what extent are social media features are applied on organisational websites**

Due to social media taking the forefront in the public eye, organisations are pressured to become more involved in not only the social media spaces such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube but to also adopt social media features such as blogs, podcasts, webinars or webcasts and social bookmarking on organisational websites. The adoption of these social media features on organisational websites shows the organisations effort to include more modern applications to engage their stakeholders and wider publics.

From the findings, the least and most common social media features on the top thirty organisational websites are identified. Photo sharing applications, podcasts, wikis and virtual worlds are the least common social media features and in fact none of these features are apparent on the organisational websites. However, the more common social media features like email and e-alerts or newsletters are found on most organisational websites.



The findings reveal organisations favour more established features on their websites. As mentioned previously social media features have been separated from the dialogic principles of communication to maintain mutually exclusive principles. The email and newsletter or e-alerts features are more established and have been used by public relations practitioners for many years have become conventional features for organisational website design and use. As the findings show organisations tended to adopt more familiar features onto their website unlike photo sharing applications, podcasts, wikis and virtual worlds that seem more harder to grasp in terms of strategic managing of online reputation.

The findings of this research study are similar to other studies done by Bhargava (2010), Eyrich et al. (2009) and Jones and DeGrow (2011). In Bhargava's (2010) research on internet and public relations in New Zealand, email and e-alerts or newsletters – are frequently used by public relations practitioners than relatively new social media features such as virtual worlds, online gaming, wikis, podcasts and photo sharing features. These findings are also supported by Eyrich et al.'s (2009) study on the adoption of social media features by public relations practitioners. In Eyrich et al.'s (2009) study it revealed public relations practitioners are more inclined to use traditional features as opposed to technologically complicated channels of communication such as that of virtual worlds, social networks or text messaging. Also, Jones and DeGrow (2011) confirms that email or newsletters are more common features evident on their research on the Fortune 500 design trends on webpages while blogs, interactive games, discussion forums are less common. The findings suggest organisations adopt and use social media features that are more established and less technologically complicated. It is fair to state organisations are more comfortable and familiar with the social media features that have been around for much longer. Also, organisations may feel they are more inclined to use more traditional features because those responsible for communication online may find certain features such as newsletters or email as a more useful and relevant way to reach their stakeholders and wider publics.

The adoption of social media is low as not many of the fourteen social media features apparent on the top thirty organisational websites were adopted. The low adoption of social media features on organisational websites indicate organisations are still unsure how social media can be integrated into organisational objectives, therefore adding value for the organisations and contributing to the bottom line. However, Vodafone New Zealand adopted the most social media features on their organisational website. Vodafone not only utilised Facebook, Twitter and Youtube pages to communicate with external stakeholders and wider publics, but also adopted blogs, social bookmarking, chat forums and newsletters on their website. Since Vodafone expresses itself as a fun, vibrant and dynamic telecommunications organisation and exudes a youthful image, it is not surprising that Vodafone is utilising and engaging in all forms of communication to appeal to a younger audience that use and engage in social media. Some of the aspects Vodafone appealed to their target public includes a personalised Youtube page that is branded in Vodafone colours – white and red, response to online queries and integration of the types of pages the organisation has.

The application and use of social media works well with the youthful and vibrant identity Vodafone projects and also matched the nature of the telecommunication industry. The effort for Vodafone to adopt more than three social media features may be due to the assumption public relations practitioners have on social media as a domain for the younger generation. Mersham et al. (2009) described the younger generation as the digital natives who are more frequent users of social media and are more likely to be at ease with how to use it. Vodafone willingness to engage in more than one social media feature shows their commitment to finding various ways to communicate with their stakeholders and wider publics. This may be the case however, Vodafone's long time competitor Telecom has also adopted social features but not to the same extent as Vodafone. Telecom is perceived to have a much older target public yet Telecom utilises Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Though it can be suggested that Telecom utilises the social media spaces to capture a younger market online to assist with their sales, improve how their organisation is perceived and also interact with their external stakeholders and wider publics. So to say organisations comply with the myth that social media is entirely used for attracting the younger generation is true in some sense but false in the way these organisations deal with

telecommunications where there's a strong focus on communication and modern ways to communicate with others. It is fair to state organisations like Telecom and Vodafone are wanting to not only communicate with external stakeholders and wider publics but to continue existing as a contemporary organisation within its wider environment. Although the study does not highlight the intentions of the organisations in adopting social media, the research findings show how organisations are selecting the channels of communication they deem are important in sustaining their communication with stakeholders and wider publics.

Despite Vodafone and Telecoms example, the findings demonstrated not many organisations as utilising them. The lack of adoption of social media features in the New Zealand organisations could be the result of public relations practitioners or those responsible for online communication not understanding how best to utilise the social media features effectively. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) and Evans et al. (2011) emphasise there are departmental and organisational factors that inhibit public relations ability to effectively utilise the interactive capacity of the internet such as understanding how social media can be used in the strategic management of online reputation and the lack of resources. Furthermore, the findings of the research show the implementation of social media features on organisational websites are still far from standardised or widespread despite the recommendations and encouragements of the benefits of using social media in literature (Jones & DeGrow, 2011). New Zealand organisations did not adopt as much social media as expected.

### **5.3 The extent organisations apply dialogic principles of communication on organisational websites**

Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework believed the online environment is ideal to foster dialogue and establish channels and procedures to build relationships. Most organisations fulfilled the usefulness of information and the principle of communication is more prominent than the other principles investigated in this research study. The information found on websites targeted investors, potential employees, customers and the media and satisfy the information needs and information seeking habits of their stakeholders by the provision of information on

products and services, investor relations, employment, sponsorship and community and presence of a media centre. By providing useful information, the organisation communicates its identity to stakeholders and wider publics. On the organisational website, press releases, organisation overviews and what activities the organisation is engaging in within its community helps communicate to stakeholders about what type of organisation it is.

Another way organisations communicate their identity and sustain the image people have of the organisation is by providing channels for generating return visits to the organisational website. This dialogic principle of communication shows the extent organisations can draw visitors to keep coming back to its website. Updated information, newsfeed links and the capacity for users to login or register with the organisation are the common ways organisations adopted to keep users returning to their website. In almost half of the organisations, promotional materials such as advertisements for products and services or deals are evident of the homepage of the organisational website. As a way for the organisation to conserve users on their website, videos, audio or downloadable information is present. However, the appearance of audio content is not common on websites as only 10% of organisations contained them and 37% of organisations used videos to engage their stakeholders and wider publics. The low percentages in the conservation of visitors to websites shows there is not much effort placed in keeping the user on their webpage or the organisation does not see why this would be needed. Also, organisations are leaning towards more visual content than audio to appeal to users.

From the findings in chapter four, not many of the organisations employ interactive, dynamic websites. Out of the dialogic principles of communication, the usefulness of information and ease of interface is mostly used however from the observation of the thirty organisational websites, most fail to employ the dialogic function well. In support of the current findings, McAllister-Spooner's (2009) ten-year literature review of dialogic principles of communication reveal websites are poorly designed dialogic tools and do not seem to effectively utilise the interactive potential of websites to build and maintain organisation-stakeholder relationships. Furthermore, it is important to note, websites and social media pages cannot be used to foster dialogue on its own,

and instead public relations practitioners or those in charge of communication online should have the knowledge and understanding of how best to apply dialogic communication on the platforms organisations choose to use (Park & Reber, 2008).

#### **5.4 The extent organisations employ the dialogic principles on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube**

According to Dominion Post (2010) and Robotham (2010) Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are popular social media in New Zealand, with approximately 1.6 million people signed up on Facebook in 2010. This number has steadily increased in the past years and as the trend towards the three social media increases among people, the expectation rises for organisations to consider using Facebook, Twitter or Youtube as ways to communicate and engage their external stakeholders and wider publics. Also as organisational reputation extends beyond traditional channels of communication like radio and television, organisations are pressured to move into relatively new communication channels to manage their online reputation.

Only nine of the thirty organisations used at least one of the social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter or Youtube) to manage organisational reputation online and communicate with external stakeholders and wider publics. Vodafone was the most consistent in providing and integrating links to other social media pages. The majority of organisations that had Facebook provided a brief description of the organisation, logo, a link to official organisational website and links to other social media pages which gives the stakeholder and wider publics basic information to identify the organisation and brand. The usefulness of information helps organisations communicate who they are. Unlike Facebook, Twitter and Youtube employed the usefulness of information to a lesser extent than organisational websites as a result of the interface and design of the social media pages but still linked the user to the official organisational website for more information.

On these pages, the usefulness of information was not the primary dialogic principle of communication used. This may be the result of organisations using these social media pages as an extension of the main organisational website. Also organisations may not

intend to use social media as a place to fulfil the information needs and seeking habits of stakeholders and wider publics but rather a place where organisations can build external communities, interact and engage external stakeholders around the organisations products and services. So in this case the generation of return visits is mostly used. Even though in Waters et al.'s (2011) study generating return visits was the weakest principle and was perceived the most difficult to implement effectively and this view is supported by Bortree and Seltzer (2009), Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) and Taylor and Kent (2004). The findings in this research indicated that generation of return was the most apparent principle on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube pages because features such joining a page (through subscribing, liking, or following), a wall for interaction, the use of promotional material and using the page as a customer service tool are attempts the organisation makes to draw the user back onto the page. The organisations provide reasons for the visitor to return to the page by frequently posting new material to maintain their recent activity on social media pages. This recent activity notifies the user through newsfeeds on their profile homepage but the extent to which the user actually returns to the page is questionable.

Despite this, the type of content to engage the user becomes more important and relevant here. The conservation principle of Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic communication framework for online communication on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, showed videos and photos were mostly used to conserve the visitors on the page. When organisations show use videos and photos to engage the user it helps the organisation show its personality, values and generally what the organisation is about. As observed in the findings, Air New Zealand's Youtube channels engaged people by creating mini shows based around the characters (Mason and Jason, Rico). The videos around the characters was not only used to promote Air New Zealand services and products but create some type of story around the characters that would help people understand what Air New Zealand is about, the values, the people who work for the organisation and also the people in their wider environment. This helps conserve visitors on their page and also keeps them coming back for the different stories.

The conservation principle and generation of return visits complement each other in this case and work together to attract users onto the social media pages and also

keeps them coming back. McAllister (2012) supports this statement, as her study on how the world's top universities provide dialogic forums for marginalised voices revealed while the usefulness of information scored high on organisational websites, the primary function of social media is not to provide information but to generate return visits and conserve time. The findings from the research study reflect the notion that organisations are more concerned with appealing and engaging stakeholders and wider publics on social media pages and do this by generating return visits and conserving the users visit on their page. Since organisations are willing to share photos and information about their organisation, they are seemingly becoming open and transparent as they continue to participate in the interactive and collaborative social media environment.

In terms of the practice, organisations should understand that creating engaging content that appeals to stakeholders and wider public's help draw attention to the organisation. Also, organisations should encourage ways for the people to return to their page by either using the built in function of the pages or try to establish channels and procedures to keep people returning to their website. A big problem for organisations is understanding how to engage stakeholders and wider publics in a way that would produce more subscriptions, tweets, posts, likes and comments on organisational Facebook, Twitter and to an extent on Youtube. A way to keep these pages active is to consistently provide ways for people to interact and engage with content. Having a page does not mean people will be instantly drawn to it and triggers participation, it takes effort and time for organisations to understand how best these social media pages can be used and how to use them effectively for their own organisation. For organisations to benefit from using social media pages, it is important that they stay active and use both the conservation of visitors and the generation of return visits to continue to stay in the minds of their stakeholders as a dormant page defeats the purpose of organisations using social media pages.

### **5.5 The extent organisations engage in two-way communication**

Organisations can manage their online reputation by understanding how best to optimise these websites for two way communication and engagement. In the research

study the dialogic loop is used to explicitly see if two-way communication is evident on organisational websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). The loop examined the responsiveness of the organisation to close the loop by replying to a post and also the attempts for organisations to pose questions in an effort to initiate two-way communication. Here the dialogic loop is dependent on interaction between stakeholders and wider publics.

All organisations showed a willingness to engage in communication with target publics by posting on the wall to post information, promotional material or to assist them with problems (in relation to products and services). It was observed that organisations on Facebook or Twitter did not assert their own opinions when people commented on the content the organisation posted. The unwillingness for organisations to fully commit to two-way communication is a way for the organisation to implicate themselves and risk saying anything that might fall back on the organisation. Based on the findings of this research, this is probably why organisations tended to use their wall on Facebook and Twitter as a customer service tool. When organisations used their social media page as a customer service tool, they displayed two-way communication yet not to the extent that dialogue would be fostered as communication between the organisation and customer for example was short-lived rather than continuous and sustained. Common responses on Facebook and Twitter pages is “thanks for your feedback”, liking the post from the person, or answering questions the person had concerning the organisations products or services. Wetzel (2011) believes that when organisations respond to a comment or query the organisation is seen as being attentive to the needs of their stakeholders and wider publics too ensure that their comment or query is being seen. These common responses can possibly generate goodwill for the organisation or it could be just platitude. However, brief these brief responses may indicate organisations may not be open to negotiate business objectives or protocols when trying to solve a person problem.

Also the findings may suggest organisations may just not have the time to fully engage in two-way communication with everyone on their pages. The literature highlighted organisations fail to adopt social media for a number of reasons. As social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter function in real-time communication, time is a major



issue as organisations would have to keep up with what people are saying online. This is the reason why Telecom has designated people to administer the organisations Facebook and Twitter pages. It was observed that Telecom listed the people who would be managing the communication on these pages. By doing so, it shows Telecom is investing the effort, money and time to engage with people in the online environment. This is why Telecom is able to keep up with the comments and enquiries on their page because the administrators are dedicating their time to answering, monitoring and posting relevant content on their Twitter. Other organisations can learn from this and designate a specific person or a number of people to take care and manage of online communication.

Also the unwillingness for organisations to fully commit to two-way communication shows organisations may not intend on communicating with stakeholders and wider publics rather organisations have other purposes for using social media pages to interact with stakeholders and wider publics. This is evident in the findings as social media pages tended to use traditional ways to communicate by displaying one-way communication through photos, campaign summaries, posting links to external news items, posting announcements, promoting organisational products and services, press releases and competitions. Waters et al. (2009) states these are the most common forms organisations use to disseminate messages on social networking sites. Also, Sinclair and Vogus (2011) supports this when they found organisations used social media for many reasons like to build brand loyalty, promote a organisation, product or brand, defend the organisation against attacks, product improvement or development, build external communities of followers, or educate customers on a specific topic of technology. When organisations do this it shows organisations have other intentions or motivations on what their social media page would be used for and are not prepared to take the risk to commit to two-way communication or foster dialogue. Although Jones et al. (2009) and Argenti and Forman (2002) suggest traditional ways to communicate is still a legitimate way for organisations to communicate, dialogue does not eventuate here and two-way communication is not used effectively. It is important to note that organisations are not required to engage in dialogue and in fact Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2011) assume organisations may want to engage in dialogue build relationships with stakeholders or to be seen as engaging in dialogue. To

be seen as engaging in dialogue infers the organisation wants to be seen as utilising the ideal spaces to foster dialogue but do not necessarily intend on using these space to do so but rather for other purposes.

On the other hand, when organisations use Facebook and Twitter pages to build a relationship with stakeholders, the start to that relationship or link is when organisations establish channels for two-way communication to occur. It shows organisations are willing to participate in a relationship with others, are committed to engaging their stakeholders and wider publics on social media pages despite the risk and vulnerability involved with interacting in the public domain. On social media pages, stakeholders and publics commit to the organisations community by joining their page. By joining the organisational page, it indicates the person wants to participate in the organisations online community and is willing to learn and share information with the organisation. Though the reason as to why people want to join an organisations page is unknown. In order for the relationship to grow organisations are required to build foundations of trust and credibility through the claims they make and act upon them. According to Edwards (2010) organisations are seen as attempting to build trust and credibility is by revealing a more human side to their communication, becoming more personable with their stakeholders and wider publics. Telecom did this by putting photos and names of the administrators on their Twitter page so that communication can be more personable between the administrator or representative and person. This will help make the stakeholders feel more confident about how they perceive the organisation and more willing to trust how the organisation presents itself. It is important to establish trust and credibility because people are voicing more scepticism and are more critical on how organisations behave in their wider environment. Though it may seem important for organisation to appear authentic, realistically organisations are unable to be truly authentic as they have hidden motives and want to achieve organisational objectives such as to increase the awareness of a new product or service or understand how people feel about an aspect of the organisation for it to be improved. Nonetheless, authenticity and also transparency is only an expectation, a desire and mostly an appearance for organisations in the public eye.

## 5.6 Summary

The evaluation shows the implementation of social media and also multimedia on organisational websites are still far from standardised or widespread, despite the encouragement and recommendations made from literature to use social media. On organisational websites the usefulness of information was mostly fulfilled however most of the thirty websites lacked the interactive and dynamic content and features to make the website more engaging for the stakeholders and wider publics. By these websites not creating more interactive and dynamic experiences for the stakeholders and wider publics, it does not entice them to continue to explore their website or look for further information. Also, the evaluation highlights that organisational websites and social media pages such as Facebook and Twitter are being underutilised by organisations to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders. On social media pages, the generation of return visits and the conservation of visitors are the most important principles as they encourage organisations to facilitate or use channels or procedures that can be used to engage their stakeholders through photos and videos, while also providing reason for visitors to return such as competitions or promotional material.

From the evaluation, not many organisations adopt social media on organisational websites and also few organisations have direct links to social media pages (Facebook, Twitter or Youtube). There are many reasons as to why there is a lack of adoption of social media in organisations. Some of these reasons are lack of understanding on how these social media can be applied, how social media contributes to organisational effectiveness and the investment social media requires such as dedicating money, time and effort to ensure the social media is managed efficiently. Though these reasons stand, these top organisations still flourish in the business sense and their motivations or intentions for using social media or not do not impact the performance of these organisations as they still are placed in the top thirty organisations. It perhaps suggests social media is adopted by these organisations because it is what their stakeholders and wider publics expect and are using. So websites and social media pages are ways the organisation can manage their communication and maintain their reputation in the online presence. In fact, websites are still used as an image tool to promote the

organisations identity and operations while social media pages Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are used as an extension for organisations to build an online community and surround their followers, subscribers or fans around organisational products, services and life. In using social media, organisations are seen as current and evolving and adapting to the environment they exist in. Also, it can be assumed that organisations care about what their stakeholders and wider publics are saying and therefore, engage in social media to protect and manage organisational reputation.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **6. 1 Overview**

The previous chapter evaluated the findings from the research study. This study focuses on the function of organisational websites and social media pages in a dynamic, interactive and complex environment. The chapter will provide conclusions from the major findings and seeks to answer the research questions proposed for this research. Chapter six will also discuss the limitations for this research, propose recommendations for future research and then make the final conclusion for this research study.

### **6.2 Conclusions from major findings**

The conclusions from the research study highlight organisations are using websites and social media pages differently from what the literature on dialogic communication and social media in organisations suggest. A gap is evident in terms of how organisations are expected to use social media and what organisations are actually doing. It is expected that organisations adopt social media and use social media pages to build relationships with stakeholders and directly communicate with them. The findings of this study highlight not many of the New Zealand organisations adopted social media onto their organisational websites or even used social media pages as a way to manage their online communication and sustain their organisational reputation. Despite the encouragement for organisations to move beyond their websites and into more interactive features like social networks and micro blogging, based on the findings of this research, only nine of the thirty organisations were willing to engage with stakeholders on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The fact that only few organisations have adopted social media pages while others have not infers whether social media has an impact on or contributes to organisational performance as still these top New Zealand organisations still flourish.

Also, in a more interactive, dynamic and collaborative environment, organisations are pressured into engaging in two-way communication and fostering dialogue. Even

though dialogue is way organisations can build relationships, evidence from the findings show organisational websites were mostly used as an image tool to provide information about the organisation and its products and services. Some of these websites lacked the interactive and dynamic features that are expected contemporary organisations adopt. On social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube), organisations tended to use the generation of return visits and the conservation of visitors principles to not engage their stakeholders through photos and videos and also encourage them to come back to their page by posting deals, competitions and promotional content. The research study has helped highlight that the content that organisations decide to use in social media and on organisations is a way for organisations to encourage participation and also trigger responses from stakeholders and wider publics.

From the research it shows organisations are using both one-way and two-way communication on social media pages. Organisations still choose to disseminate information and links on their pages while at the same time engage in two-way communication when the organisations use their page as a customer service tool to interact with their stakeholders and wider publics. Despite the hopes of dialogue eventuating between organisations and stakeholders in the online, from the findings, it seems organisations are more concerned with using social media for other reasons. This is evident in how organisations are choosing to use social media pages. The findings show organisations as using two-way communication but this communication is short-lived rather than continuous and sustained. This shows that organisations may not be interested in sustaining communication with stakeholders and are in fact more concerned with achieving other organisational objectives. It demonstrates that organisations have other motivations for interacting with stakeholders and wider publics in the online environment. By saying this, an open dialogue may seem unachievable as organisations make dialogue a challenge when they have ulterior motives for communication and are unable to relinquish the control that they have.

However, organisations do show signs of adopting the principles of dialogue by their commitment to collaborate and engage stakeholders and the willingness to participate in the social media environment. Also, organisations make an effort to participate in

social media regardless of the inherent risks involved in interacting in a public domain. When organisations choose to do so, they become more visible and to some extent vulnerable in the online environment, therefore exposing the organisation to criticisms from stakeholders and wider publics.

As a result of this research, organisations can establish channels and procedures for two-way communication on organisational websites and social media pages. It is how organisations choose to use these channels and procedures are entirely up to them and should be the role of the public relations practitioner to utilise the best channels or procedures to manage organisational-stakeholder relationships. However, this is not the case as the role to manage online communication is in the hands of many people (marketers and IT professionals) that do not necessarily have the knowledge and skill to utilise these channels and procedures effectively. Furthermore, it is important that those responsible for communicating online choose the social media features that are more applicable to the type of organisation, their stakeholders, and is more than capable of fulfilling particular jobs and business objectives. More importantly, how organisations choose to use social media influences organisation-stakeholder relationships.

As it is unknown whether public relations practitioners are responsible for online communication on websites and social media pages, it is important for them to be involved in managing communication and have an input in the strategic management of online communication. The research study shows a snapshot of the top thirty organisations and their understanding of two-way communication.

For organisations, social media is a way for them to learn more about their stakeholders and wider publics, understand their opinions, their preferences and what they do. From a marketing perspective social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube can be an opportunity for organisations to gather information about their stakeholders that would help target their products and services more precisely. For example, the “talking about it” feature on Facebook allows organisations to understand the types of people liking the page and interacting with the organisation.

This study contributes to the understanding of how organisations engage in social media and also the dialogic process. The research study provides a snapshot of the top thirty New Zealand organisations and highlights there is a disparity between the expectations of social media use in organisations and the actual use of social media. Implications of this research study for professional practice or decision-making is organisations can strategically communicate on websites and social media pages to manage organisational reputation by selecting the right people to apply and utilise communication tools effectively such as in two-way communication. Organisations can also enhance their stakeholders and wider publics experience on websites and social media pages and meet their expectations. This study shows that organisations that use social media are willing to be part of a more interactive and collaborative environment despite the inherent risks involved, also the study highlights organisations use of social media and their understanding of two-way communication. These findings are applicable for organisation deciding to use social media in their organisations and to help them understand how organisations within their environment are integrating social media into their business strategy. This research study can act as a case study on the practical use of social media and two-way communication within New Zealand organisations. It is important for New Zealand organisations to have case studies that relate to their own environment as most case studies regarding social media are based on the Fortune 500 companies that are primarily American. So how the Fortune 500 companies using social media may not suit the context and environment New Zealand organisations use social media and interactive technologies due to the scale and interests of their organisational stakeholders and wider publics.

### **6.3 Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. This research study only shows a snapshot of how the top thirty organisations use websites and social media pages to establish channels and procedures to foster dialogue. Also, as purposive sampling is used to select thirty organisations from New Zealand Management magazine the small sample size is not representative of all New Zealand organisations. Another limitation to the study is that not all content on organisational websites and social media are studied. This is due to the parameters set for this research study to select the social media pages that only



had a direct link from the organisational website, to use Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of communication to mark the presence of the features on websites and social media pages and to mark the presence of social media features on organisational websites. The features used in this study are also derived from literature and observation of organisational websites and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Youtube). Also by using Kent and Taylors (1998) framework of dialogic principles of communication it meant using a dichotomous scale where links are either present or absent. My study extended this simple measurement by also using latent content to investigate the types of content available and the placement of the features and quality of them rather than simply using a dichotomous type of approach. Since this research study uses a qualitative and interpretive research method, the observations, findings and conclusions are subjective and are difficult to replicate and generalise across other studies. However, this type of study provides a more insightful discussion on the adoption of social media and two-way communication in the top thirty New Zealand organisations.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

It is recommended that organisations understand how social media fits within the organisation and whether it actually has a place within the organisations. Also more importantly how organisation choose to engage with stakeholders and wider publics needs to be taken into consideration if organisations want to appeal to their target publics or trigger responses from them. Also, it is recommended that populist literature on social media and two-way communication is updated to reflect the actual uses of dialogic communication or social media. By doing so, it would help provide a more accurate picture on how social media and two-way communication is being used. From understanding what is happening in reality, there is a call for public relations research to update the theory regarding dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication and its practicality for public relations practitioners. The concepts of both dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication pose challenges for organisations to implement as the literature highlighted that interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders cannot be equal, covert agendas are apparent and power dynamics exist. Furthermore, Kent and Taylor's (1998) framework of dialogic

principles of communication needs to be updated as more interactive features have come about since 1998 and the online environment has become more complex and dynamic.

For future research, public relations researchers can analyse whether content on organisational websites and social media pages engage their stakeholders and cause the individual to respond or react to that content. The communication style such as the tone of public relations practitioners on social media pages can also be an avenue of research to determine which styles of communication organisations prefer to communicate messages on social media pages. Also it would be important to investigate the stakeholders' expectations and preferences for social media and organisational websites to see whether being dynamic, social and interactive are important characteristics for an organisation to have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore as the study focused on the top thirty organisations many of them were organisations that dealt with manufacturing, oil and construction. A more specialised focus on an industry such as retail could provide more specific analysis of the extent of dialogic principles of communication on websites and social media. Also since this study did not use any interviews or questionnaires the actual intentions and motivations of organisations of their social media use is unknown. To do interviews on what and why organisations use social media for would complement this research study and support the findings of the decisions found on organisational websites and selected social media pages.

## **6.5 Summary**

The research study presents a snapshot of the organisational decisions implemented on websites and selected social media pages and also sheds light on the development of websites in the era of social media technologies. A qualitative content analysis is used to collect primary data from organisational websites and selected social media pages in the hopes to answer the extent organisations adopt social media features and employ dialogic principles of communication on organisation websites and selected social media pages. The websites and selected social media pages act as the forefront of the organisation and provide the first interaction between the organisation and

stakeholders. The findings revealed do not utilise all the dialogic principles of communication and organisations preferred to employ social media features that are more institutionalised than relatively new and complex tools such as virtual worlds. Also, although there has been pressure for organisations to adopt social media in organisations and engage in a more collaborative and interactive environment, the findings show not many organisations have jumped on this bandwagon as there is a low adoption of social media features on organisational websites. This research study sheds light on how organisations are choosing to use social media and two-way communication and their efforts to adapt to an ever interactive and dynamic environment in which their organisation exists, grows and survives.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: List of top 30 New Zealand organisations

New Zealand Management top 30 organisations 2010		Website	Industry
1	Fonterra Co-operative Group (Auckland)	www.fonterra.com	Primary Production
2	Fletcher Building (Auckland)	www.fletcherbuilding.com	Construction/ Infrastructure
3	Telecom Corporation of new Zealand (Wellington)	www.telecom.co.nz	Communications/ Media
4	Woolworths New Zealand Group (Auckland)	www.woolworths.com.au	Retail/ Wholesale
5	Air New Zealand	www.airnewzealand.co.nz	Transportation
6	Foodstuffs (Auckland)	www.foodstuffs.co.nz	Retail/ Wholesale
7	Shell New Zealand Holding Company (Wellington)	www.shell.co.nz	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
8	BP New Zealand Holdings (Wellington)	www.bp.com/nz	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
9	Foodstuffs South Island (Christchurch)	www.foodstuffs-si.co.nz/	Retail/ Wholesale
10	Foodstuffs (Wellington) Co-operative Lower Hutt	www.foodstuffs.co.nz/	Retail/ Wholesale
11	Contact Energy Wellington	www.contactenergy.co.nz	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
12	Fulton Hogan Christchurch	www.fultonhogan.com/New Zealand	Construction/ Infrastructure
13	Chevron New Zealand (Auckland)	www.caltex.co.nz	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
14	Silver Fern Farms (Dunedin)	www.silverfernfarms.co.nz/	Primary Production
15	Meridian Energy (Wellington)	www.meridianenergy.co.nz/	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water

**Continuation of Appendix A**

<b>New Zealand Management top 30 organisations 2010</b>		<b>Website</b>	<b>Industry</b>
16	Infratil (Wellington)	<a href="http://www.infratil.com/">www.infratil.com/</a>	Diversified Corporates
17	Genesis Power (Auckland)	<a href="http://www.genesisenergy.co.nz/">www.genesisenergy.co.nz/</a>	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
18	ExxonMobil New Zealand Holdings (Auckland)	<a href="http://www.mobil.com/New_Zealand-English/PA/default.aspx">www.mobil.com/New_Zealand-English/PA/default.aspx</a>	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
19	The Warehouse Group	<a href="http://www.thewarehouse.co.nz">www.thewarehouse.co.nz</a>	Retail/ Wholesale
20	Vodafone New Zealand	<a href="http://www.vodafone.co.nz">www.vodafone.co.nz</a>	Communications/ Media
21	ZESPRI Group	<a href="http://www.zespri.com">www.zespri.com</a>	Primary Production
22	Mighty River Power	<a href="http://www.mightyriverpower.co.nz/">www.mightyriverpower.co.nz/</a>	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
23	Alliance Group	<a href="http://www.alliance.co.nz">www.alliance.co.nz</a>	Primary Production
24	Nuplex Industries	<a href="http://www.nuplex.co.nz">www.nuplex.co.nz</a>	Manufacturing
25	Ebos Group	<a href="http://www.ebos.co.nz">www.ebos.co.nz</a>	Community Services
26	New Zealand Post	<a href="http://www.nzpost.co.nz">www.nzpost.co.nz</a>	Diversified Corporates
27	Vector	<a href="http://www.vector.co.nz">www.vector.co.nz</a>	Oil/Gas/Mineral/Electricity/ Water
28	ANZCO Foods	<a href="http://www.anzcofoods.co.nz">www.anzcofoods.co.nz</a>	Primary Production
29	Goodman Fielder New Zealand	<a href="http://www.goodmanfielder.com.au">www.goodmanfielder.com.au</a>	Foods (Processed)/ Beverages
30	PGG Wrightson	<a href="http://www.pggwrightson.co.nz/">www.pggwrightson.co.nz/</a>	Diversified Corporates

**Appendix B: Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of communication (for websites)**

	<b>Feature code</b>	<b>Name of feature</b>	<b>Definition of feature</b>
<b>Ease of interface</b>	F1	Browser capability	Presence of a link that allows people to change the browser on homepage
	F2	Site guide/map/directory	Link that shows the different components of a site on homepage
	F3	Section for popular topics/searches	Section that highlights popular searchers on home page
	F4	Search engine box	The presence of a search engine box on home page
	F5	Option to change language/location	Link that offers a person to change the language
<b>Generation of return visits</b>	F6	Ability to subscribe	Link to subscribe to information
	F7	Promotional material	Presence of giveaways and competitions on the homepage
	F8	Calendar of events	Presence of a list of events on homepage
	F9	Login/registration	Link to register of login on homepage
	F10	Newsfeed link	An icon that provides news updates
	F11	Information updated within 30 days	
<b>Conservation of visitors</b>	F12	Video (button, link or self-playing)	Video that is apparent on the homepage
	F13	Audio (button, link or self-playing)	Audio apparent on the homepage
	F14	Downloadable information	
<b>Usefulness of information</b>	F15	Overview of organisation	A section which provides information about the organisation. For example, about us, mission and vision statements
	F16	Employment information	Information available for those looking for jobs
	F17	Privacy policy	
	F18	Products & Services	Information on the organisational products and services
	F19	Investor information	Information relating to annual reports, investor relations
	F20	Legal or terms of use	
	F21	Help or FAQ	
	F22	Contact us or feedback form	
	F23	Newsroom or media centre	Information for the media public regarding news releases, policies, industry news.
	F24	Sponsorship & community	Information regarding the organisational responsibility in the community
<b>Dialogue loop</b>	F25	Organisation poses a question to stimulate dialogue	A statement that ends in a question mark on homepage
	F26	Organisation responds directly to a question or comment by another person	Appearance of the organisational response to comment on homepage



**Appendix C: Kent & Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles of communication (for Facebook, Twitter and Youtube)**

Principle	Feature	Definition
Dialogue loop	Organisation poses a question to stimulate dialogue	A statement that ends in a question mark on homepage
	Organisation responds directly to a question or comment by another person	Appearance of the organisational response to comment on homepage
	Recent activity of post 24 hours Within 7 days Within 1 month (30 days)	
Generation of return visits	Wall	
	Join page (subscribe, follow, like)	Opportunity for a person to subscribe to information. The appearance of a link
	Promotional material	On the first page of the social media site, the organisation is seen to promote a product or service. This is in terms of giveaways, competitions
	Customer service	On the first page of the social media site, the organisation is seen to provide customer service. This is the found in the users posting a problem
	Calendar of events	
Conservation of visitors	Videos	
	Photos	
	Downloadable information	
Usefulness of information	Link to official organisation website	Links to the official organisational website
	Link to other social media pages the organisation has	Links to other social media pages the organisation has
	Number of people following organisation/ number of likes	Appearance of who the organisation follows or likes
	Overview of the organisation	
	Logo	
	Employment information	
	Map of location	
	Photos of team administration	
	Names of team administration	
	Sponsors	Information regarding who sponsors the organisation

## Appendix D: Social media codes, features and definition

Code	Social media feature	Definition
B	Blogs	Link to organisational blog apparent on the homepage
M	Micro-blogs (e.g. Twitter)	Link to micro-blogs apparent on the homepage
SN	Social networking (e.g. Facebook)	Link to social networking sites apparent on the homepage
VS	Video sharing (e.g. Youtube)	Link to video sharing on the homepage
PS	Photo sharing (e.g. Flickr)	Link to photo sharing platforms on the homepage
Wi	Wikis	Link to wikis on homepage
P	Podcasts	Presence of podcasts on homepage
W	Webcasts/webinars	Presence of webcasts on homepage
S	Social bookmarking (e.g. RSS, XML)	Presence of social bookmarking tools
CF	Chat forums	Link to and presence of chat forum on homepage
O	Online gaming	Link to and presence of games
VW	Virtual worlds (e.g. second life)	Link to virtual worlds on the home page
E/N	E-alerts/ Newsletters	Link to sign up for e-alerts/ newsletters on homepage
E	Email	Link to email